

THE RELATION OF KARL BARTH  
to the  
HISTORIC CREEDS AND STANDARDS OF THE CHURCH

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INTRODUCTION.

The subject of this thesis, The Relation of Karl Barth to the Historic Creeds and Standards of the Church, presents us with two questions, a formal and a material question. First, what is a Reformed Confession of Faith? And secondly, what is the content of a Confession of Faith? Under the formal question of what is a Reformed Confession I understand the definition of the Confession in relation to the Church's language about God and heresy, to dogmatics, dogma and Church proclamation, to Scripture and the Word of God, to philosophy, exegesis and historical criticism. I understand also the relation of the Confession to the Church and to Church union. Finally, I include under the formal question the further question of the desirability and possibility of a Confession to-day.

An answer to the material question involves comparing the particular doctrines of Barth's theology with those set down in the historic standards of the Church. We mean, of course, the standards of the Reformed Church. This task of comparison presented certain difficulties, chiefly because the scope of Barth's theological work to date is very limited. Actually he has not yet begun to write dogmatics! So

far he has only published the first half of his prolegomena to Dogmatics. Naturally Barth has had to deal with most of the theological problems in the course of his explication of the Doctrine of the Word of God. But it would be highly inadvisable, for instance, to compare Barth's doctrines of justification and sanctification with the standards of our Church until he himself had systematically dealt with them. Any comparison of the Swiss theologian with the Reformed symbols would obviously need to be confined to those doctrines which Barth has expounded. In view of the fact, moreover, that he now discounts his commentary to the Epistle to the Romans as affording a basis for determining his dogmatic position, a considerable source of material is denied to the conscientious investigator at the outset. Accordingly in this thesis I have only once quoted from the Romans.

I do not believe that at this stage it is possible in any comprehensive fashion to compare and to contrast Barth with Calvin, upon whose teaching many of our Reformed standards are based. At Christmas 1936 I had my first opportunity of discussing this thesis with Barth personally. When he was informed that I was dealing with his relation to the Reformers, he asked: "And what do you find?" Having in mind the formal

aspect of our subject - in which we are convinced there is substantial agreement between Barth and the authors of our Confessions - I replied: "You agree with the Reformers". Whereupon he said: "I have just written an article, as yet unpublished, in which I disagree with Calvin in eight different points". One might instance in this connection, moreover, an article written by Barth in Theologische Existenz heute, Gottes Gnadenwahl, in which he takes exception to Calvin's doctrine of predestination.

Barth has already published, however, an exposition of the Apostles' Creed, and in his treatment of the doctrine of the Trinity in his doctrine of the Word of God an exposition of the Nicene Creed. We therefore know his stand in relation to these standards of the Church. But the most satisfactory method of comparing Barth with our Reformed Church standards is on the basis of the Barmen Confession of 1934 of which he is the author. Herein is summarised the fruits of Barth's dogmatic work. In the second part of this thesis I propose to analyse and compare the Barmen Confession, proposition for proposition, with some thirteen of the most important of our confessional documents. In the prosecution of this work we shall discover certain differences in the historic standards themselves. Some

will be found to speak on particular themes on which others are silent. An effort will be made to adjudge Barth on the basis of a consensus of the Reformed symbols. In this thesis only scant attention will be paid to the controversies which divided the Lutherans and Reformed Churchmen, as they have not been nor are live issues in our Church.

Under the doctrine of the Word of God, Barth comprehends the doctrine of Church proclamation. Although he nowhere sets forth a systematic presentation of the doctrine of a Confession of Faith, we have been able to do so by re-arranging material collected from all his writings. When the subject of The Relation of Karl Barth to the Historic Creeds and Standards of the Church was first suggested to me by Dr John Macconachie of Dundee, and later confirmed by the late Professor Hugh Mackintosh and the Ph.D. Committee, I was keenly conscious of the importance of the work not only for the University but also for the Church. If the Church's Confession of her Faith becomes a vital question again in the religious and political life of Scotland, as it has in recent years in Germany, I am persuaded that the material contained in this thesis will be of tremendous value. Consequently I have endeavoured to give a complete, authentic and systematic presentation of the

doctrine of a Confession of Faith in Part I of this book. Here are set forth answers to all those knotty questions such as, Who can confess? Can the State be the author of a Confession? Do Confessions destroy the unity of the Church? What authority has a Confession? In what sense is it binding? What are the marks of a true and false Confession? Is the Short Statement of the Church's Faith, issued by the Church of Scotland, a genuine Confession? What is the relation existing between a Confession and dogmatics? What is dogma? What is the difference between a Roman Catholic and an Evangelical Confession? Could the Church of Scotland write a Confession to-day?

Part I of this thesis is not a commentary on the theology of Karl Barth. It is rather an honest attempt to set forth his answer to the question, What is a Confession of Faith? and in his own words. Most of the material has never before appeared in English. Chapters 2, 3, and 4 of Part I involved the translation of nearly 150 pages of German. At the same time I have constantly referred to the historic standards of the Church with a view to determining their answer to the question, What is a Confession of Faith? Attention, moreover, has been given to the writings of John Calvin who was the author of several, and the inspirer

of most of our Reformed symbols. A special section dealing with Calvin and the Confession of Faith has been appended. On the other hand, not sufficient space has been devoted to the views of modern English-speaking theologians. To deal adequately with representatives of modern Protestant theology would over-burden the main thesis, and extend it beyond proper proportions. However, care has frequently been taken to show the pertinence for us of Barth's words which were originally addressed to the German situation.

The more original and critical contribution to this thesis is to be found in Part II, in which we deal with the significance of the Barmen Declaration, and its analysis and comparison with the confessional documents of the Reformed Church. Here we see how those very principles which are expounded in Part I are realised and applied. I trust, moreover, that the material provided in Part II will be no less valuable to the Church for a true understanding of the confessional heritage come down to her from the 16th century.

A word needs to be said here concerning the bibliography given at the end of this book, and the use made of it. Besides a list of the works by Karl Barth and other writers quoted in this thesis, lists have been compiled of books in English dealing with the so-called

'Barthian Theology'. Although I am thoroughly familiar with most of the commentaries on Barth, and with the translations from the writings of Emil Brunner, with one exception, no use has been made of them whatever. Nevertheless, they have undoubtedly contributed not a little to inciting my interest and increasing my understanding of Barth's theology. What I owe to pioneers like Macconachie, Lowrie and Campfield would be difficult to assess. On the other hand, I am of the opinion that these commentaries are of little value in acquiring an accurate knowledge of Barth's thought. Indeed, some of them are definitely misleading, and most of them show a tendency to class Barth, Brunner, Gogarten and Bultmann together. I have also included a list of books by British and American theologians dealing with Creeds and Confessions historically and critically. Of these, Professor Curtis's well-known work is unquestionably the most exhaustive. The only book in English, however, which is at all comparable to the dogmatic character and scope of this present work is the long preface to Volume I of Dunlop's Collection of Confessions of Faith of the Church of Scotland. Unfortunately it exhibits those weaknesses of Protestant scholasticism of the early 18th century.

It only remains for me to thank those who have

assisted me in any way. Above all, thanks are due to Professor Barth himself who on several occasions gave several hours to a discussion of this thesis. I wish to acknowledge my indebtedness to the late Professor Hugh Mackintosh, Professor G. T. Thomson and Professor John Baillie for valuable advice concerning the plan and content of the work. Special thanks are due to Professor Thomson for helpful corrections in the translations of the two Barmen Confessions which are included in the appendix to this book.



PART I.

THE FORMAL QUESTION.

## CHAPTER I.

### THE DEFINITION OF A CONFESSION.

#### Section 1: The Definition of a Confession a Science.

We understand by the definition of a Confession of Faith the scientific investigation and exposition of the relations obtaining between a Confession of Faith and other theological concepts; that is to say, the investigation of the relation of a Confession to language about God and heresy, to the Scriptures, the Word of God and Biblical exegesis, and to dogma, dogmatics and Church proclamation. Definition of a Confession of Faith, therefore, requires a definition of the other theological concepts as well. Strictly speaking, the definition of a Confession involves an answer to the whole formal question, 'What is a Confession of faith?' which will engage our attention in Part I of this thesis. But because of the importance and magnitude of the subject of the relation of the Church and Church Union to its Confession, we have chosen to devote two separate chapters to it. Still another chapter will be given to the question of the Desirability and Possibility of a Confession.

We said that the definition of a Confession of Faith is the scientific investigation and exposition

of relations. The work set forth in this thesis is, certainly in its intention at least, Church dogmatic work. Dogmatics is a science. It is a science because it is a human effort after knowledge and follows a definite, consistent path of knowledge.<sup>1</sup> But it is a science determined altogether both in the methods which it employs and the results it achieves by the Object of its knowledge. The Object of all theological thought is the man Jesus Christ as He is testified to in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments.<sup>2</sup> Consequently the task of defining a Confession is bound and limited by the Object of all dogmatic work. Dogmatic work proceeds upon a given data - the Scriptures. The defining of a Confession is exposition of the Scriptures! Accordingly, we will not be able to define the Confession in relation to Church proclamation, for instance, on the basis of how these concepts have been conceived in the past, nor upon the basis of interpretations which men may arbitrarily give to them to-day.

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1. Karl Barth, The Doctrine of the Word of God, Prolegomena to Church Dogmatics, Vol. I, Part I, English transl. p. 7. Note: Further quotations from this work will be indicated by the one word 'Dogmatics'.
  2. For a full account of this statement see Evangelische Theologie, February 1937. Die Grundformen des theologischen Denkens. This paper was later given by Professor Barth before the New College Theological Society, Edinburgh, March 19, 1937.

This thesis, then, is not a piece of historical research, not a contribution to the history of religion. Nor is it a study of Confessions as expressions of the religious and moral consciousness of the Christian community. It is true that in the course of our dogmatic work we will have to deal with definitions of the Confession, of Church proclamation and of Scripture, etc., which are the results of investigations based upon pre-suppositions other than those which we as Church dogmatists are obliged to acknowledge. But our methods and our results must in no way be determined by false, i.e. unscriptural, definitions. On the contrary, precisely in loyalty to the Object of our thought our task will necessarily have to assume a polemical aspect towards these other definitions. When we claim that our work is scientific we do not admit that we must conform to a more or less generally entertained conception of science. We begin, then, with a simple and brief definition of a Confession which, while not conflicting with what may properly be said about a Confession, certainly needs amplification.

## Section 2:    Language about God.

The confession of the Church's faith is set forth in the written form of a creed, a rule of faith or a

symbol.<sup>1</sup> It is obvious, of course, that there are other forms in which the Church confesses her faith. "The Church confesses God by the fact that she speaks of God. She does so first of all through her existence

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1. Philip Schaff, D.D., in his History of the Creeds of Christendom, p.3, gives the following information of the three terms creed, rule of faith and symbol. "The word 'creed' is derived from the beginning of the Apostles' Creed (Credo, I believe), to which the term is applied more particularly. ΚΑΝΩΝ ΤΗΣ ΠΙΣΤΕΩΣ or ΤΗΣ ΑΛΗΘΕΙΑΣ regula fidei, regula veritatis are the oldest terms used by the anti-Nicene fathers. ΣΥΜΒΟΛΟΝ symbolum, mark, badge, watchword, test, shibboleth (from συνβαλλειν to throw together, to compare), was first used in a theological sense by Cyprian, a.d. 250 (Ep. 76, al. 69, ad Magnum, where it is said of the schismatic Novatianus, 'eodem symbolo, quo et nos, baptizare'), and then very generally since the fourth century. It was briefly applied to the Apostles' Creed as the baptismal confession by which Christians could be known and distinguished from Jews, heretics, and heathens, in the sense of a military signal or watchword (tessera militaris); the Christians being regarded as soldiers of Christ fighting under the banner of the Cross. Ambrose (d. 397) calls it 'cordis signaculum et nostrae militiae sacramentum'. Rufinus, in his Expositio in Symb. Apost., uses the word likewise in the military sense, but gives it also the meaning collatio, contributio (confounding συμβολον with συμβολη), with reference to the legend of the origin of the creed from contributions of the twelve apostles ('quod plures in unum conferunt, id enim fecerunt apostoli', etc.). Others take the word in the sense of a compact or agreement (so Suicer, Theo. eccl. II. 1084: 'Dicere possumus, symbolum non a militari, sed a contractum tessera nomen id accepisse; est enim tessera pacti, quod in baptismo inimus cum Deo'). Still others derive it (with King, History of the Apostles' Creed, p. 8) from the signs of

in each individual believer. And she does so in the second place through her special action as a community; in proclamation by preaching and administration of the sacraments, in worship, in instruction, in her mission work within and without the Church, including loving activity among the sick, the weak and those in jeopardy."<sup>1</sup> While the written Confessions of Faith are included in the Church's general confession of her faith, in as much as they partake of the language about God, it must be recognised that they possess a special character of their own. To determine precisely what this special character is, will be the object of our investigation. But since creeds, rules of faith or symbols share in the Church's general language about God, it should be observed at this early stage that "not all man's language is language about God",<sup>2</sup> and therefore that not all written articles of faith (belief) are confessions of faith! The confessions of the National Socialists or of the German Faith Movement

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recognition among the heathen in their mysteries. Luther and Melancthon first applied it to Protestant creeds. A distinction is sometimes made between Symbol and Symbolical Book, as also between symbola publica and symbola privata. The term theologia symbolica is of more recent origin than the term libri symbolici."

1. Dogmatics, Vol. I, Part I, p. 1.

2. Ibid. p. 51.

are not confessions of faith.<sup>1</sup> The platform of a political party, even if it is adopted and recommended by the Church, is definitely not a confession of faith. If man were living in his original state or in the realm of glory, we should be compelled to say that all man's language was language about God. We should have to say that man's political, social, aesthetic, philosophic and religious speech was divine. As it is, man exists in the realm of grace, where in his lost state he is met by mercy. Thus man's language as such, even in its highest and purest forms, is not language about God. Neither man's good intentions nor his lofty aspirations are able to convert his language into language about God. The chasm here is much deeper than that which exists between 'religious' and 'worldly' language; the latter is but a sign of the divorce between God and man.<sup>2</sup> "Nevertheless, there is a human language distinguished genuinely and concretely from other human language as language about God; certainly not in and for itself, but in virtue of divine

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1. For a complete compilation of all the articles of belief of the Church, movements, religions and political parties which have appeared in Germany during 1933 and 1934 see Kurt, Dietrich Schmidt, Die Bekenntnisse des Jahres 1933, and a similar volume for the year 1934 by the same author.

2. Dogmatics, p. 51 f.

confirmation and preservation - divine confirmation and preservation of what genuinely and concretely distinguishes it from all other human language. When the essence of the Church, Jesus Christ, as the acting Person of God, sanctifies the being of men in the visible area of human happening into being in the Church, then He also sanctifies their language into the language about God which is found in the Church."<sup>1</sup>

For the most part it is not difficult to see that the language of man outside the Church is not language about God. For admittedly its theme is not the essence of the Church, Jesus Christ, but - the world. Art, science, philosophy make no pretence of speaking of Jesus Christ, even though they may claim to supersede Him. Their subject-matter is the objective world. The language of the world remains ultimately undialectical and unbroken. Even when it speaks of faith it does not mean the crisis of all human knowledge as such but rather the complement, fulfilment or presupposition of human knowledge. With intentional reserve have we stated that for the most part it is not difficult to see that the language of man outside the Church is not language about God. But such is the miserable state

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1. Dogmatics, p. 53 f.



into which the modern Protestant Church has fallen in America that, having lost a consciousness of the uniqueness of her own language about God, she fails to see that idealism in the forms of a socialistic, political programme, or of the humanitarianism of good-will clubs and welfare organizations, or of the slogan of 'truth, beauty and goodness', is not the same thing as her own true language about God. It is by no means always clear within the Church herself that the Kingdom of God is not identical with a social utopia, or with the right of each individual in society to realize his own personality to the full. Nor is it clear to the Church that the Righteousness of which she must speak is not the same thing as those civic ideals of brotherly love, honesty, sobriety so readily embraced by the State and as readily dispensed by her schools, humanitarian organizations and press. For this reason the Church does not know that the sermon, a specific form which her language about God must take, is something quite different from a lecture or address on sociology and economics, on ethical problems (the problem of world peace, for example), or even upon the religious teachings of Jesus. This confusion within the Church herself, this inability to perceive clearly the difference between the language of the world and the language

about God has led to the conclusion that one can hear what the Church has to say quite as well outside the Church. Indeed, it has led to the increasingly widespread conviction that one may quite easily dispense with the Church. Yet in spite of this blindness of the Church we affirm that it should not be difficult to perceive that language which lays no claim to speak about Jesus Christ is in fact quite simply not language about Him. In any event the world does not think it is speaking about Jesus Christ even if the Church does not understand the difference between what the world is saying and what she ought to say.

### Section 3: The Confession of Faith and Heresy.

There is, however, a language which, precisely because it does presume to speak about God and His Son Jesus Christ, is not so easily recognised as language outside the Church, and therefore language not about God. This is the language of heresy. "By heresy we understand a form of Christian faith such that formally (because it too stands in relation to Jesus Christ, His Church, baptism, Holy Writ, the general Christian confessional formulae, etc.) we cannot dispute its property of being a form of Christian faith, without yet being in the position to understand what we are ~~saying~~

doing in acknowledging it as such, because we can only regard its content (the interpretation which it contains of these general presuppositions) as a contradiction of faith."<sup>1</sup> Because heresy appears in the form of faith, there may, and there must be, serious conflict. For this reason the Church's conflict with Jews, pagans and atheists has never been pursued with such emphasis and zeal as against heretics. The Church and heretics, seeing the same object absolutely differently, speak to each other, and not past each other, as is the case when the Church and atheists converse together. "The much-boasted progress from the 17th and 18th centuries consisted in the fact that people made up their minds to tolerate one another, i.e. freely and mutually to leave one another to their fate".

We are to-day faced with the fact of heresy. On the one hand we have the fact of Roman Catholicism and on the other, pietistic-rationalistic Modernism with its roots in medieval mysticism and the humanist Renaissance. The heresy of modern Protestantism has come to light in the errors of the German Christians and has been condemned by the German Evangelical Church of Jesus Christ in its Confessions of Faith of Barmen and Dahlem, 1934.

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1. Ibid. p.34. See pp. 33-38 for the whole discussion of the subject of heresy.

The fight there against heresy has been simultaneously a fight for the Confessions of Faith. The whole issue is just between the Church's faith contained in her historic symbols and the false doctrines proclaimed by her enemies. No matter how distasteful it may be to us, the fact remains that the subject of creeds cannot be seriously raised without at the same time raising the question of heresy in our midst. When the Confessional Church in Germany labelled and condemned the heresies of modern Protestantism at the Barmen and Dahlem synods, she did in fact raise the joint question of Confessions and heresy in a very concrete and inescapable fashion. To-day a Church has spoken and speaks - a Church which claims to be the Church, the true Church, the Church of the Reformation. And she claims to be the true visible Church because she will be grounded upon pure doctrine and will expel from her body all false doctrines and heresies which destroy the unity of the Church and which, in deed, are a denial of the Church.<sup>1</sup> In the first article of the Confession

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1. Calvin explicitly teaches in the fourth book the Institutes of the Christian Religion that the Church is where there is pure doctrine, and that the unity of the Church consists in the purity of her doctrine. He summarises his argument with these words from Book IV, Chap. II, Sec. 1: "As soon as falsehood has forced its way into the citadel of religion, as soon as the sum of necessary doctrine is inverted, and the use of the

of Faith submitted by Karl Barth and adopted by the Free Reformed Synod assembled at Barmen, January 4, 1934, it is denied that Church development since the Reformation has been normal! Thus the Churches of other lands are asked whether they form an exception to the historical evolution of Protestantism and therefore do not require to confess their faith in their own place in opposition to heresy. The Church asks us how far we are also a Church and how far we are one with them and with the Reformation. Of course, it may be possible for us to declare that the Confessional Church in Germany to-day, and even the Church of the Reformation, is not the Church, but it is certain that we shall not be able to do so without a thorough-going discussion of heresy and the historic articles of faith.

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Sacraments is destroyed, the death of the Church undoubtedly ensues, just as the life of man is destroyed when his throat is pierced, or his vitals mortally wounded. This is clearly evinced by the words of Paul when he says that the Church is "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone" (Eph. ii, 20). If the Church is founded upon the doctrine of the apostles and prophets, by which believers are enjoined to place their salvation in Christ alone, then, if that doctrine is destroyed, how can the Church continue to stand? The Church must necessarily fall whenever that sum of religion which alone can sustain it has given way. Again, if the true Church is "the pillar and ground of truth" (1 Tim. iii, 15) it is certain that there is no Church where lying and falsehood have usurped the ascendancy."

The important point for us to note here is that it is a Church which speaks to us to-day and not merely an individual theologian. Previously Karl Barth alone attacked and exposed the heresies within the Church. Like Martin Luther some four hundred years before, Barth dared to speak in the name of the Christian community which was then invisible.<sup>1</sup> Accordingly, it has been possible, especially from our strongly individualistic point of view, to regard the theology of Karl Barth as one theology among many within the Church. With our easy-going, tolerant, relativistic philosophy we could regard his voice as one amid a babble of voices clamouring to be heard and to be believed. To-day the situation is altered. No longer does Barth speak alone or in the name of an invisible Church. To-day the Church speaks with an unanimity, definiteness and clarity such as has not been heard since the sixteenth

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1. It is interesting to note in this connection that Barth writes of Luther what is virtually true of himself in our day. Das Bekenntnis der Reformation und unser Bekennen, p. 5: "Und nur eine Kirche kann bekennen, nicht ein Einzelner, der Jesus Christus nicht gemeinsam mit Anderen gehört hat; es wäre denn, dieser Einzelne würde sich, wie Luther in gewissen Augenblicken seines Lebens, unterwinden dürfen, in seiner Einsamkeit im Namen der zur Zeit unsichtbaren kirchlichen Gemeinschaft zureden."

century. Although Barth has always professed his complete solidarity with the Church in its misery and in its blessedness,<sup>1</sup> more recently has he insisted that he speaks in the Church, to the Church, for the Church, and in responsibility to the Church. He is conscious

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1. Commenting on Romans 9:3, p. 336 f. of the English translation of his commentary to this epistle, Barth writes as follows: "The prophet will indeed undertake from time to time to warn those who seem to have altogether forgotten eternity; but he will do this not without a certain grim humour, for he is aware that his warning is no more than a parable; and in no case will he imagine that in voicing his warning he is fashioning some new truth which brings him into personal opposition to the Church. However much he may be tempted to dislike the Church and to pour scorn upon it, he will never entertain the idea of leaving it or of renouncing his orders, for that would be even less intelligent than if he were to take his own life. He knows the catastrophe of the Church to be inevitable; and he knows also that there is no friendly lifeboat into which he can clamber and row clear of the imminent disaster..... And after each violent attack has been launched upon the Church he will return to the place where the man of the world - especially the religious-ecclesiastical man is - accursed from Christ, in order that he may hope for salvation by the grace of God only. Nothing but the honour of God can make any sense whatever of anti-clerical propaganda. Attacks on the Church which proceed upon the assumption that its enemies possess some superior knowledge or some superior method of justifying and saving themselves are - non-sense. Consequently when the prophet raises his voice to preserve the memory of eternity in himself and in the Church, he will always prefer to take up his position in hell with the Church - and this is applicable to the study of theology - rather than to exalt himself with the pietists - whether they be crude or refined, old-fashioned or modernist, is irrelevant - into a heaven which does not exist."

that he has "undertaken a dogmatics of the Evangelical Church".<sup>1</sup> He has no desire to found a school or to be the representative of a school.<sup>2</sup> Least of all does he write as the protagonist of the 'dialectical theology'.<sup>3</sup> The communion in which and for which he has written his dogmatics is the communion of the Church, not a "theological community of work".<sup>4</sup> And he has purposely altered the title of his dogmatics from that of 'Christian' to 'Church' Dogmatics in order to indicate that dogmatics is not a free science but one bound to the sphere of the Church, where and where alone it is possible and sensible.<sup>5</sup> It is also to be observed that in recent lectures which he has delivered in Switzerland Barth quite frankly appeals to the Church in Germany and to the fight there for the purity of doctrine. Quite simply: Barth is neither alone nor wishes to be alone in the struggle against heresy and for the Confessions of Faith. Therefore, we can truly

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1. Dogmatics, p. xii.

2. Ibid. p. xii.

3. Ibid. p. xii.

4. Ibid. p. xii.

5. Ibid. p. ix.



claim that we are seeking to set forth in this book as accurately as possible not simply the teachings of Karl Barth concerning the Confessions of Faith but of the Evangelical Church of Jesus Christ! And we are setting forth not merely the teachings of the Evangelical Church in Germany but of the Evangelical Church wherever it may exist. The agreement which exists between the teaching of Barth and that of the Evangelical Church will become abundantly clear when we come to deal with the content of the Confession of Faith in the second part of this Thesis.

Because we in the English-speaking world are not faced with the phenomenon of the "German" Christians, is no reason to conclude that we are free of the heresies inherent in modern Protestantism, or that our need to confess our faith anew is any less urgent. On the contrary, our almost complete indifference to the confessional question - except when we are compelled to deal with it as a result of our interest in ecclesiastical unions - would rather seem to indicate that we have much more in common with the "German" Christians. It might be better if we withheld, on the one hand, our invectives against the slogan of "Race, Folk, and Blood", and on the other, our sympathies for the persecuted Church in Germany. "I feared," writes Barth,

"I feared that if I were living anywhere in a foreign country I would have to join the Church opposition just as quickly as I have done here in Germany. Whoever is not clear about that knows not what he does when he praises me. We are grateful to those outside Germany for their sympathy in our troubles and struggles when they realise that here it is not a case of an accidental error in the German Church, but a common need of the whole Christian Church; we are fighting out a matter here in Germany which sooner or later, perhaps in other forms, must be fought out in every modern Church. Whoever knows this fact cannot give us enough support; he will not do it with rounds of applause but in his confessing the Christian faith clearly and definitely."<sup>1</sup>

"It may be that what is now the present for Germany will one day be Europe's future; that the totalitarian state is the nature and secret of every state..... Is it not possible that the struggle of the Confessional Church is a prelude to a general new ordering of the relation of Church and state? that there will once again be a relation which is an original state of opposition? Then the Church will be the only place of refuge for freedom, justice and the spirit. The Church is more

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1. Theologische Existenz heute, No. 5, Die Kirche Jesu Christi, p. 9 f.

than that. But that it is to-day actually such in Germany is a fact which should at least give rise to reflection."<sup>1</sup>

We have not been side-tracked; we have sought to emphasize the importance of the distinction between the Church's language about God and heresy. And we have endeavoured to show that this distinction is presented to us by the Evangelical Church herself. This has been done to impress upon us the fact that we are actually involved in the same problems, that there exists for us no real vantage point outside the battle-field of truth and error. The spectator-attitude is denied to us at the outset.

#### Section 4: Necessity of a Formulated Confession of Faith.

We have purposely declared that the Church confesses her faith primarily and necessarily, although not exclusively, in a written form. This needs to be emphasized. We are well aware that in our insistence upon the formulated character of a Confession of Faith we will encounter the stiffest opposition. One observes "the old unwillingness or the old fear of formulated confessions on the part of those who denote

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1. Die Bekenkende Kirche in heutigen Deutschland, an unpublished lecture delivered in Schaffhausen, Switzerland, March 1936.

themselves 'Liberals'."<sup>1</sup> The opposition to formulated confessions seems to be the expression of the desire to defend oneself against God Himself.<sup>2</sup> For the 'Liberals' who oppose confessional formulae the words 'conscience', 'conviction' and 'freedom' are 'last words'. Since, however, these words belong to the realm of anthropology, we must say to him who would exalt freedom of conscience and personal convictions above the authority of a Confession of Faith: You have another spirit than we! In other words, we recognise in the conflicting attitudes to the written creeds a division of spirits. The resistance to the decisive and binding character of a Rule of Faith proceeds from the freedom of the self-sufficient, unbroken man, and not from the freedom of the Holy Spirit.<sup>3</sup>

Going hand in hand with the dislike for the written form of the Confession of Faith is the opinion that

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1. Theologische Existenz heute, No. 29. Das Bekenntnis der Reformation und unser Bekennen, p.33.

2. Ibid. p.34.

3. Ibid. p. 35. In the discussion which followed the deliverance of this same lecture Barth expressed in unequivocal language the gulf which lies between him and his opponents to formulated confessions when he addressed them with the following words: "Freunde will ich sie nämlich gerne nennen, Brüder in Christus - nein, das sind wir nun einmal nicht, wenn und solange wir uns gerade in Christus so gar nicht verstehen." - Ibid. p. 36.

other forms of confessing are more eloquent and suitable. It is averred that a confession, of good deeds, of suffering and of life excel the Church symbols.

Concerning these forms of confessing, it must be said that when the Church really confesses, these forms cannot possibly be lacking. But they possess no independent, self-sufficient meaning of their own.<sup>1</sup>

"Those who, according to Matthew 7:21 f., were able to address Jesus in the unacceptable manner, Lord! Lord! were able to refer to many deeds that they had done....

The genuine confession which also makes for the best life and the deepest suffering, that which is called *ὁμολογεῖν* and *μαρτυρεῖν* in the New Testament, is, whether it pleases our intellectualism or not, a confessing with the lips, in words, sentences and phrases..... The faith - namely the faith of the Church, which is no private matter, comes from hearing and hearing by preaching (Rom. 10:14 f.), and it takes this way, the way from heart to mouth, not, of course, without an attitude and deeds, not without suffering and life, but nevertheless, this way! In general and in principle, one will certainly not be able to assert whether this must be the way to confessions in the

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1. Ibid. p. 16.

narrower sense and that is to confessional formulas and confessional symbols. It could be that the proclamation, the sermon of a Church in its living and efficacious theology as such, and without the restraint of special, expressed formulations, is already the good confession of Jesus Christ in the protest and struggle against error. In the Churches of the New Testament the simplest confessional formulas appear to have been sufficient. Why should a Church which is conscious that it is fulfilling this presupposition not be able to dispense with a formulated confession of faith in the freedom of the Holy Spirit? But what if she has no such consciousness to-day? Could it not be that such a consciousness is just that which the Church has quite simply taken upon herself since the days of the apostles and by which she would forget that she is the Church of sinners? Against the prohibition to give expression to a formulated confession (such as the Augsburg Confession) which makes visible a Church decision, explains its content and remains a warning and comforting recollection of that event - against such a prohibition one will have to register a protest in the name of the freedom of the Holy Spirit. If there is no absolute necessity for a Confession of Faith, so also there need not be an absolute fear of one. With what right would one ascribe to the Holy Spirit a

special antipathy towards a common consciousness of the answer which must be given to the Lord in the Confession of Faith, a special antipathy towards an orderly theological and perhaps now also complicated treatment and formulation, a special antipathy towards just a written and public fixing of the Confession of Faith? Why should that not all be demanded just by the Holy Spirit for the sake of the need of the Church and for the sake of the seriousness of her confessional task? It is a question of His freedom, not our fear of binding ourselves or of being bound, as little as it is not a question of our desire to bend beneath any self-chosen yoke perhaps on the morrow. When it is a question of His freedom, if we have the right under certain circumstances truly in His freedom to deprive ourselves of the formulations, then we will not be able to deny that we must reckon with the fact that, again in His Freedom, perhaps under other circumstances, we must formulate (our faith) very precisely, and it must be very stringently formulated."<sup>1</sup>

The opinion that "doctrine" is something else and something less worthy and less important than "life" is behind the idea that our suffering and our good deeds may well take the place of a written article of faith.

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1. Ibid. p. 16 f.

Our suffering and good deeds, however, are never the subject of a confession of faith but its predicate. Confession or witness is a human word to which power is given by God. The power of a testimony, according to the Scriptures, does not lie in the piety, in the deeds or in the suffering of the people who testify, as was later believed by the martyrs, but in that God had chosen them to be witnesses of Him in their written or spoken words.<sup>1</sup> Nowhere in the New Testament is a Church "washed and cleansed by the blood of the martyrs". The word 'witness' is not used in the New Testament for that which the martyrs do and suffer. The calling attention to, and the glorification of the martyrs, is not to be found in the New Testament. It comes later, first in the letters of Ignatius. The death of a martyr is recounted for us in the New Testament, that of Stephen, but it is his speech which makes him a witness, not his suffering.<sup>2</sup>

The objection to the written or formulated Confession of Faith goes far deeper than we have indicated. It has its roots in the belief that the "symbol" has more "religious" or "spiritual" value than the Word. It figures the clash between the predominant historicity

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1. Theologische Existenz heute, No. 12, Der Christ als Zeuge, p. 6.

2. Ibid. p. 24.



of the Bible and the unhistorical feeling of Hellenism. And similarly it mirrors the clash between the modern denial of history in Hegel and his followers - the reduction of history to the Idea - and the Bible which, because of its witness to revelation posits history as actual and real.

In modern representatives of the Hellenistic spirit like Gilbert Murray, we find expression given to the preference for the symbol to the Word, whether in Scripture, preaching or creeds.<sup>1</sup> But in Paul Tillich the attack upon the reality of the Word is more dangerous

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1. Gilbert Murray writes as follows: "Is it perhaps that one difference between Religion and Superstition lies exactly in this, that superstition degrades its worship by turning its beliefs into so many statements of brute fact, on which it must needs act without question, without striving, without any respect for others or any desire for higher and fuller truth? In Religion, however precious you may consider the truth you draw from it, you know that it is truth seen dimly, and possibly seen by others better than you. You know that all your creeds and definitions are mere metaphors, attempts to use human language for a purpose for which it was never made. Your concepts are, by the nature of things, inadequate, the truth is not in you but beyond you, a thing not conquered but still to be pursued. Something like this, I take it, was the character of the Olympian Religion in the higher minds of later Greece. Its gods would awaken man's worship and strengthen his higher aspirations; but at heart they knew themselves to be only metaphors. As the most beautiful image carved by man was not the god, but only a symbol to help towards conceiving the god, so the god himself, when conceived, was not the reality but only a symbol to help towards conceiving the reality. That was the

because it is more insidious. For he regards the Word as a symbol! That is to say, he denies to the Word its human, temporal characteristics. "It is quite wrong," he writes, "to equate the Word as a symbol of the self-impartation of Being Beyond with the Word as the physical medium of the self-comprehension and self-impartation of the human spirit, and in this way to mix up God's Word with the word of Scripture or the word of preaching. On the contrary, we must simply (!) point to the fact that for Christian theology Jesus Christ is the Word, not His words but His essence, which finds expression as much in His words as also in His action and passion."<sup>1</sup> "Upon which the comment is, that the words, the action and passion and the essence of Jesus Christ cannot be separated from each other in such wise that words, actions and passion are but the 'expression' of His essence, as if His essence stood equally behind words, action and passion. The essence of His person is identical with His language, action and passion. Now this essence of Christ is moreover not directly present to us, but it must become present to us, and

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work set before them. Meantime they issued no creeds that contradicted knowledge, no commands that made man sin against his own inner light." "Five Stages of Greek Religion", p. 99 f.

1. P. Tillich, Rel. Verwirklichung, 1930, p. 49.

it can only become indirectly present to us, namely, through the Word-proclamation first of Holy Scripture and next of the Church as well. If Christ's essence is present to us, that takes place absolutely in such a way that it is equated with the 'word as the physical means of self-comprehension and self-impartation on the part of the human spirit', that therefore the word of Scripture and the word of preaching become the Word of God."<sup>1</sup> Again we read in Tillich: "Verbum, the Word of revelation, may (!) be in everything in which spirit expresses itself, even in the silent symbols of art, even in the works of society and law. And therefore a Church must be able to speak in all these forms. They must all become symbols of the Word of revelation."<sup>2</sup> Of course, this leads to a reductio ad absurdum, and one is bound to ask, Why symbols at all? Why not rather be silent? <sup>3</sup>Indeed, Tillich practically admits as much in his words: "Undoubtedly the highest aim of a theological work would be to discover the point at which reality itself speaks unsymbolically alike of itself and of the unconditional, to discover the point at which reality itself without a symbol becomes a symbol, at which the

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1. Dogmatics, p. 156.

2. P. Tillich, Kirche und Kultur, 1924, p. 19 f.

3. Dogmatics, p. 70.

opposition between reality and symbol is removed."<sup>1</sup>

When once the superiority of the symbol over the written word is granted, there follows inevitably a whole train of symbols, - music, painting, dancing, Church architecture, stained-glass windows, images, candles, etc.<sup>2</sup> Nature itself is said to speak so that one can have "communion with the Infinite" in the "silences of the forest" better than by "listening to a preacher's voice" or by "going to Church". One cannot fail to observe in this lust for symbolism a connection with pantheism and mysticism, with their presupposition of a general, timeless revelation of God accessible to all men. And one cannot fail to perceive the fundamental opposition between all this and the word of the Confession of Faith, with its interpretation of the words of Scripture, the witness to the historic revelation of God in the man Christ Jesus. Nor will one be altogether blind to the inner connection between the efforts of modern Protestantism to "create a religious atmosphere" by means of symbols, chiefly music, and the

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1. Tillich, Relig. Verwirklichung, p. 108.

2. According to Schaff, Creeeds of the Greek and Latin Churches, p. 73, the seventh (and strictly last) ecumenical council held, under the Empress Irene, at Nicaea, A.D. 787, and hence also called the second Nicene Council, condemned the Iconoclasts, and sanctioned the ecclesiastical use and limited use

Roman Catholics' almost complete emphasis upon the sacraments to the almost utter neglect of preaching. Preaching in the Church of the pope is largely limited to apologetic instruction and moral exhortation. It has no real understanding of preaching as proclamation.<sup>1</sup> Consequently the one who says he goes to Church to worship and not to hear a sermon knows neither the meaning of worship nor of preaching, and is no better off than his Roman friends.

It is the Incarnation - "the Word became flesh" - that makes impossible all separation of the human words of Scripture and of proclamation from God in heaven. "And the Word was God." Similarly it is the Incarnation which gives to the Creeds and Confessions of Faith their verbal, as distinct from symbolic character. Since "Christ Jesus, who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be made equal with God; but made Himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of man; and being formed in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross", then we ought not to refrain from beholding and

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of sacred images. But this decision is recognised only by Greeks and Romans, while Protestants regard it as a lapse into refined idolatry, condemned by the primitive Church and the second commandment.

1. See Dogmatics, p. 71 f.

confessing the Lord of glory in the fallible, questionable, transitory, temporary and human words of Scripture and proclamation. We ought to seek Him where alone He has chosen to be found. The scandal of the Incarnation, of the Eternal One becoming historical, accidental and miserably insignificant, is reflected in the scandal which the Creed with its formulated and verbal nature provokes. It is predominantly in the Creed that attention is drawn to the contingency, historicity and visibility of the Word, and therefore to its real incarnation. The foolishness to the Greeks of Christ crucified, and the stumbling-block to the Jews, is reflected in the statement of it in the dogmas of the Creeds. The bare historic facts which are set forth in the Apostles' Creed as if in angry refusal of all abstract philosophising and mysticism which would cut Christianity away from her historic foundations - "born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried" - constitute the offence to the natural man.

Section 5: Confession of Faith, Dogmatics and Church Proclamation.

We come now to the task of defining the relation of the Confession of Faith and dogmatics to each other, and of both to Church proclamation. "The task, though

not the reality of proclamation, may be reduced and limited to the two concepts, preaching and sacrament."<sup>1</sup>

"Prayer, singing and confession of the Church are obviously what they are alleged to be, only when they do their utmost to abstain, on the one hand from the impossible, namely, wishing to proclaim something to God, on the other hand also from the unworthy, namely, wishing by the way to proclaim something to men. It is the answer directed to God of the praise, repentance, and thanks of the man who has experienced a proclamation from Him. It is a sacrifice, the offering of which to God can only signify the attestation of what He has done to man, in which the latter obviously can entertain no designs regarding the other men who may chance to be present with him."<sup>2</sup> Similarly social work, instruction of youth and theology can not as such claim to be proclamation. "All these functions presuppose the proclamation that has taken place."<sup>3</sup> The difference between Church proclamation and other forms of language about God, including a creed, is that in proclamation there is not only the intention to speak about God but in it God verily speaks Himself! "In

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1. Dogmatics, p. 89 f. See also pp. 51-79.

2. Ibid. p. 54.

3. Ibid. p. 56.

the Church's proclamation it is not the concept 'language about God' that goes to pieces, but its ambiguity. To proclaim of course also means to speak about God. But here in language about God is concealed, as the meaning of this action, proclamation, the intention to speak the Word of God Himself."<sup>1</sup> "Real preaching means the Word of God preached..... The Word of God preached means man's language about God, in which and through which God Himself speaks about Himself."<sup>2</sup>

It is not our lot to set forth the doctrine of Church proclamation with any degree of completeness. But we must draw attention to just this unambiguous quality which constitutes its pre-eminence and distinctiveness in order not to confuse the proper functions of dogmatics and Confessions of faith with proclamation as such. Church proclamation is predicatio verbi Dei est verbum Dei.<sup>3</sup> The apostle Paul rejoices "because when ye received the word of God which ye heard from us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which

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1. Ibid. p. 56.

2. Ibid. p. 106.

3. Conf. Helv. post. 1562 art. 1, 2.



effectually worketh also in you that believe.<sup>1</sup> And in the first Epistle of Peter we read: "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God".<sup>2</sup> If the problem of Christology is presented to us very concretely and acutely in the doctrine of the Lord's Supper, no less are we confronted with the same problem in the sermon.<sup>3</sup> In preaching we have to do with the question of the receiving of God Himself in His revelation. Just as there is in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper "a double appropriation, a physical appropriation of the bread and wine and a spiritual appropriation of the true body and blood of the Lord, both united in the unio sacramentalis but in that union still remaining qualitatively distinct",<sup>4</sup> so in the sermon one hears the word of man and the Word of God in indissoluble union yet remaining distinct within that union. As no one has expressed this "Chalcedonian" character of preaching more clearly than Martin Luther, we gladly repeat here several selections which Barth himself has quoted.<sup>5</sup> "Now I

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1. I Thessalonians, ii, 13.

2. I Peter, iv, 11.

3. Dogmatics, p. 98 f.

4. The Word of God and the Word of Man, p. 255.

5. Dogmatics, p. 107 f.

or any man who speaketh Christ's Word may freely boast that his mouth is Christ's mouth. I am certain that my word is not mine but Christ's Word, therefore my mouth must be His whose Word it speaketh." And again, "Tis a right excellent thing, that every honest pastor's and preacher's mouth is Christ's mouth, and his word and forgiveness is Christ's word and forgiveness. If thou hast sin and dost confess the same and believest in Christ, the pastor and preacher shall forgive that same sin in Christ's place, and the words which he saith to thee on God's behalf thou shalt receive as if Christ himself had said them unto thee. Therefore, we do well to call the pastor's and preacher's word which he preacheth, God's Word. For the office is not the pastor's and preacher's, but God's." Yet again, "On the last day God will say to me, Hast thou also preached that? I shall say, Yea, exactly. Then God will say to thee, Hast thou also heard that? And thou shalt answer, Yea. And He saith further, Wherefore hast thou then not believed? And then thou sayest, O, I held it for a word of man, since a poor chaplain or village parson uttered it. So shall the same word that sticketh in thine heart accuse thee and be thine accuser and judge at the last day. For it is God's Word, 'tis God Himself thou has heard, as Christ saith, 'He that heareth you heareth Me'." And finally, "If thou hear me who am a

preacher, and hear me none otherwise than thou hearest another man, and likewise believe my words none otherwise than other men's words, thou are condemned along with me..... Therefore thou shouldest not hear me as a man who preacheth man's word. If then thou hear me thus, 'twere much better thou heardest me not at all. Thus, too, thy pastor thou shouldest not hear as a man who speaketh and preacheth man's word, but shouldest hear him as Him who speaketh the word out of the mouth of babes and sucklings." Nor is there any disagreement between Calvin and Luther in this conception of the preaching office. The former writes: "Those who think that the authority of the doctrine is impaired by the insignificance of the men who are called to teach, betray their ingratitude; for among the many noble endowments with which God has adorned the human race, one of the most remarkable is that he deigns to consecrate the mouths and tongues of men to his service, making his voice to be heard in them. Wherefore, let us not on our part decline obediently to embrace the doctrine of salvation, delivered by his command and mouth, because, although the power of God is not confined to external means, he has, however, confined us to his ordinary method of teaching, which method, when fanatics refuse to observe, they entangle themselves

in many fatal snares."<sup>1</sup> Commenting on II Corinthians, v., 20, Calvin writes in the same vein: "'For God did beseech you through us'. That is of high importance, indeed indispensable for the credibility of the messenger. For who would base his eternal salvation upon the witness of a man? The matter is far too important for us to be satisfied with promises out of a human mouth: we must know that God speaks to us through these men. This is contained in the words of Christ which assign to the apostles their high calling (Lk. xvi:16, Mt. xviii, 18): 'Who hears you heareth Me'. 'What you will bind on earth is also bound in heaven'."

We must remember, however, that real proclamation of the Word of God cannot be limited by our intention to speak the Word.<sup>2</sup> For God nothing can exist to prevent Him turning the language about God of Church instruction, of theology and of the creeds into a proclamation of His Word to us. "But the question, What can God do? is different from the question, What is the commission laid upon us through the promise given to the Church?..... God may speak to us through Russian communism or a flute concerto, a blossoming shrub or a dead dog. We shall do well to listen to Him if He

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1. Calvin's Institutes, Book IV, Chap. 1, Sec. 5.  
See also Calvin's commentary to II Corinthians, v, 20.

2. Dogmatics, p. 58 f.

really does so. But we shall not be able to say - that would mean that we considered ourselves the prophets and founders of a new Church - that we are commissioned to spread what we so hear as an independent proclamation. And so we may very well and rightly suppose that we have heard God's Word in the prayer and loving action, in the youth instruction and in the theology of the Church we know, without our having received on our side a commission to push it all as actual proclamation."<sup>1</sup> In a word: the Confession of Faith is not, in its intention, real proclamation of the Word of God, and is thus to be distinguished negatively from preaching and the sacraments.

Now that the nature of Church proclamation has become somewhat clearer for us, we may observe the affinity which obtains between the Confession of Faith and dogmatics before passing on to a consideration of the relation of both to Church proclamation. "The meaning, task and nature of a Creed, if not identical with that of dogmatics, certainly stand in the closest connection."<sup>2</sup> The Apostles' Creed in particular may be said to form the ground-plan of dogmatics.<sup>3</sup> And it is interesting to note in passing that Calvin's

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1. Dogmatics, p. 60 f.

2. Credo, p. 5, German Edition.

3. Ibid. p. 5.

Institutes follows the form of the Apostles' Creed and presumes to be nothing more than a detailed exposition of the articles of the Creed. "Dogmatics itself is not a Confession of Faith. But as the action of certain individual members of the confessional Church it is allied to it. It is the clarification of already existing Confessions of Faith, and the preparation for new ones. Because the Church must ever again understand its Confession of Faith anew, and because it ever again stands before the necessity of confessing anew, it requires dogmatics as well as the Confession of Faith. There exists no other justification for dogmatics."<sup>1</sup>

Both the Confession of Faith and dogmatics stand strictly within the sphere of the Church's confessing of her faith. "The subject of the Confession of Faith is the Church, and therefore not the individual as such in virtue of some human or even divine distinction, but on the contrary, solely in virtue of his distinction as member of the Church..... The subject of dogmatics can be an individual only as one commissioned to be a 'Teacher of the Church', - that means, as one teaching in the Church, from the Church and for the Church, not as a scholar, but as one called to the teaching office. The private person of the theological professor, and

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1. Credo, p. 7.

his views and insights as such, are an uninteresting matter. And the same holds good for the hearer and reader as a future preacher. Lectures and studies in dogmatics are a public and responsible action only in so far as the Church alone is verily able to speak and to hear in its dogmatics just as in its Confession of Faith."<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, it follows that dogmatics and the Confession of Faith cannot take place outside the Church, outside of faith and the knowledge of God.<sup>2</sup>

The Confession of Faith is a collection of statements of belief, credo, or the corresponding Greek word πιστευω. "That means quite simply the act of acknowledgment of the reality of God as it concerns man in the form of definite perceptions (Erkenntnisse) won from the revelation of God. Belief (Der Glaube) is therefore a decision: the exclusion of unbelief, the overcoming of the contradiction of this reality, the affirmation of its existence and validity..... Belief (Der Glaube)<sup>3</sup> lives from its Object. It lives

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1. Credo, p. 7 f.

2. Dogmatics, p. 18.

3. The German word 'Der Glaube' has two meanings of belief and faith. I have translated the word in this passage from the Credo as it seemed to be what Barth meant from the context. When he says that "Der Glaube lebt von seinem Gegenstand" I take it that he means that the possibility of

from the call to which it is an answer. It lives from it because, in so far as it is the call of God: credo in unum Deum.....et in Jesum Christum.....et in Spiritum Sanctum. The earnestness and the power of belief is the earnestness and the power of the Truth, which is identical with God Himself, which the believer has heard and has perceived in the form of certain truths, in the form of articles of faith. And also the disclosing of this truth is the free gift which falls to the believing man. It is God's own revelation. Man obeys the decision of GOD with his own decision when he believes. All that we have just said is equally valid for dogmatics. It also is the human acknowledgment of the reality of God in its revelation. It too lives alone by the truth which reaches man: as obedience to the decision of God over which man has no power. Also it happens concretely: in the execution of the affirmation of certain truths, in which execution the truth of God becomes concretely the property of man. Dogmatics is also here in its substance an act of faith. This, however, is the special thing about dogmatics: it is an act of faith which desires to understand and to

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believing the separate truths, the articles of faith proceeds from God Who as the Object of belief (and faith) is always clothed in intellectual propositions.



explain itself. Dogmatics endeavours therefore to reflect in human thoughts and to repeat in human language what has been said to it before in the revelation of the reality of God. Dogmatics exhibits and displays those truths in which the truth of God concretely encounters us. It articulates the articles of faith again. It attempts to see and to make clear their connection and their existence side by side. It asks, where it is necessary, about articles of faith which until now have not been known and acknowledged."<sup>1</sup>

"The problem of the Creed and of all Church Confessions of Faith arises out of the problem of Church proclamation. To the Church has been entrusted the glad-tidings of the reality of God as it concerns men. To the Church's faith is it entrusted! But that means to the work of its faith in all its fallibility and human frailty; to the human and all-too-human understanding and misunderstanding of God's judgment, to the clash and contradiction of human opinions and convictions. It may be asked what becomes of the purity of that which is entrusted to the hands of pardoned men but to the hands of men who always remain pardoned sinners. One can and must reply: God can and will

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1. Credo, p. 6 f.

preserve it pure even in impure hands. But that does not relieve us of the concern for the purity of our hands, or of the question concerning true and proper proclamation. From this concern and from this question originates the Church's Confession of Faith. The Confession of Faith is always the result of strenuous efforts in consequence of this concern and this question. It is always an attempt to protect divine truth against human error. A Confession of Faith is always concrete, historical decision, a fighting-action of the Church which believes it hears the voice of unbelief, of heresy or of superstition in this and that conviction and doctrine which are dragged out of the bag, which believes it must oppose to this voice a necessary 'No' with the 'Yes' of faith. And this she does for the purification of her hands in view of the purity of the message which is entrusted to them, so that her proclamation may be proper proclamation.

"In this connection dogmatics acquires its meaning and its task. It is no idle intellectual game. Nor is it research for the sake of research. It fulfils the indispensable office of the guardian of Church proclamation as it explains the existing Confession of Faith and prepares the way for a new one. In opposition to the errors of the time it jumps into the breach where

the old Confession of Faith is no longer applicable, or is no longer understood, and a new one is not yet in existence. Certainly it cannot speak with the authority of a Confession of Faith of the Church. For as a living science it speaks with greater flexibility and adaptability to the situation of the moment, with greater exactness and sharpness in its particular examination. It can certainly degenerate and run wild like Church proclamation itself. It may very well be that it goes astray and leads astray in regard to the Confession of Faith to which it is attached. It may very well be that the reverse occurs: that dogmatics must be called to order and corrected by a Church proclamation which finds itself in a better condition. As the Confession of Faith cannot be a mechanically effective assurance of the good message in the Church, neither can dogmatics be."<sup>1</sup>

"The necessity for dogmatics (and, we take it, for the Confession of Faith as well) differs from the necessity for Church proclamation. Proclamation must exist as the execution of the divine behest to the Church. Dogmatics must exist because proclamation is fallible human work. These are two different things. The relation of proclamation to the Christian subject-matter is obviously a primary one, that of dogmatics (and the

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1. Credo, p. 8 f.

Confession of Faith) a secondary. The datum from which dogmatics start is neither God, nor revelation, nor faith. This is the datum from which proclamation starts. Certainly even dogmatics (and the Confession of Faith) may and should be proclamation, in which case it too starts from this datum. But so far as dogmatics has a function of its own which does not coincide with that of proclamation, the datum is a different one, namely the debatable fact that in proclamation by men there is human language about God, revelation, faith - debatable, because it is not self-evident that this is uttered in truth and in purity, and because the Church cannot shirk responsibility for the fact that it ought to be uttered in truth and purity."<sup>1</sup>

Dogmatics and the Confession of Faith possess a different mode and function but by no means higher degree of faith or knowledge of faith than Church proclamation."<sup>2</sup>

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1. Dogmatics, p. 91 f. The words in brackets have been inserted. Originally the passage dealt simply with dogmatics. The fact that what is said here of dogmatics is equally true of the Confession of Faith is implied in what we have learned of the affinity which obtains between them.

2. Ibid, p. 93.

Nor do they give access to a higher and better source of knowledge. It is not as though Christian thought in its more scientific forms, or rather more systematic forms,<sup>1</sup> is more adequate and profound than simple preaching.<sup>2</sup> And even as critical reflection does not distinguish dogmatics from Church proclamation, so the Confession of Faith is not to be distinguished from Church proclamation as a result of critical reflection. We have already remarked<sup>3</sup> that theological thought is a necessary presupposition of a Confession of Faith in our day. But if we make critical, reflective thought in itself the element which distinguishes dogmatic work from Church proclamation we leave the door open to some philosophy as the criterion of Church proclamation. Man's intellect as such is not the norm for judging the truth of God. Were man's reason in this exalted position it would admittedly be superior and primary to

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1. See p. 318 f. of the Dogmatics for the reference here to systematic and unsystematic dogmatics, or as Barth calls it, regular or school dogmatics and irregular dogmatics. The work of Calvin represents the former; Luther's the latter. The latter is no less scientific than the former because of its irregular character.

2. Ibid. p. 93.

3. See Chap. I, p. 2f. of this work.

Truth itself. Ans so we must confess that the thought of man's reason must be related to the Object of the Church's proclamation, and the execution of thought must be determined by its divine Object and not by its human origin and essence. "Credo ut intelligam in Anselm of Canterbury (Prosl. I) means, certainly not the transition from faith to another genus, but an  
 αὐτοχρημαλωτίζεον παν νόημα εἰς τὴν ὑπακοήν  
 τοῦ Χριστοῦ.  
 (II Cor. x, 5)."<sup>1</sup>

"In practice it is not in our power to prevent this inroad of philosophy into dogmatics. Neither is it in our power to give to critically reflective human thought in practice such a relation to the divine Object or such a determination in terms of It. But it is, of course, in our power to keep before us the need for such a relation and definition, and therefore to refuse any philosophy this right of irruption, to give the last word, not to any immanent regulations of critically reflective thought, but solely to the needs of the Object here called in question."<sup>2</sup> The fact is whenever we speak we find ourselves in the realm of philosophy. That this is as true of the Christian sermon as it is of the Confession of Faith recalls to us that the 'Word

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1. Dogmatics, p. 94.

2. Ibid. p. 94.

became flesh'.<sup>1</sup> It cannot be denied that "when we speak as theologians in human concepts, and therefore in the concepts of a certain philosophy, we undertake something dangerous. It may be that the ideas which we use as form already possess a definite content which may lead us into channels which have nothing to do with what we are compelled to say as theologians. Accordingly it is maintained that the philosophical ideas which are used must first as such be 'explained'. And so immediately there is set up the presupposition that there are two sources of revelation: reason and history on the one hand, the Holy Scriptures on the other. If this conception of the relation of theology and philosophy is fundamentally erroneous, there remains only the following fact: as a theologian I have my language, and I encounter with it an object which meets me in the witness of Holy Scriptures. While I appropriate this witness, I am not free from philosophy but I am not bound to a particular philosophy. 'All things are lawful unto me, but I will not be brought under the power of any.' (I Cor. vi, 12) The occurrence of the formation of theological knowledge will consist in the fact that I allow my thought and my speech to be defined by my object. The Word is not subjected to human

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1. Credo, p. 158.

presuppositions; on the contrary, human presuppositions are subjected to the Word."<sup>1</sup> And so we conclude that though the Apostles' Creed and all Confessions of Faith are expressions of human thought in human language they are not subordinate to, nor products of a philosophy.

In defining the Confession of Faith and dogmatics in their relation to Church proclamation we must recognise that certain very definite boundaries are set to them. "It is by no means the case that in dogmatics the Church is so to speak to become the Lord and Judge of the Christian subject-matter, so that the results of dogmatics from time to time would have to rank as a deity, as a law superimposed, so to speak, upon its revelation and upon faith. Dogmatics has to investigate, and now and again to re-establish her findings as to how we are best to speak about God, revelation, faith, so far as human language about these things is to rank as Church proclamation. But it must not imagine that it can establish what God, revelation, faith are in themselves. Alike in its investigations and in its findings it must keep in view that God is in heaven, but itself upon earth, that as compared with any human language and so even with that of the best dogmatics, God, His revelation and faith continue to

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1. Credo, p. 158 f.



live their own free life. Though we have repeatedly considered everything and set it right and improved the formulation of it, as is our duty to the Christian subject-matter in respect of man's language about it - and though our results should even be exalted into the Church's confession and dogma, we ought then to say, We are unprofitable servants! and in no sense to imagine that we have in the very slightest become masters of the subject-matter."<sup>1</sup> Here it is appropriate to introduce the criticism of the so-called Athanasian Creed.

"In the well-known introductory words of the Athanasian Creed dogmatics, i.e. dogma, comes forward with the following claim: Quicumque vult salvus esse, ante omnia opus est, ut teneat catholicam fidem, quam nisi quisque integram inviolatamque servaverit, absque dubio in aeternum peribit. That goes too far. Such fixation of saving faith in a human theologoumenon which is to that extent always open to attack, has nothing to do with the binding and loosing upon earth with which, according to the Gospel (Matt. xvi, 19; xviii, 18), there corresponds a being bound or loosed in heaven, because in that way the power to judge, there assigned to the act of obedience involved in apostolic proclamation, is transferred to a formula abstracted from this

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1. Dogmatics, p. 95 f.

act, to a sequence of words as such, which as contrasted with the act of obedience mentioned, is an instrument with which man masters God, revelation and faith."<sup>1</sup>

The Creed and dogmatics as such are not able to guarantee genuine proclamation. They are only attempts in this direction. Three necessary boundaries are set to them within the life of the Church. "The first is the sacrament, by which the Church permits herself to be reminded that all her words, even her words which are blessed and confirmed by God's Word and Spirit can only aim at the event itself in which God encounters man in His reality. Just the visible signs of baptism and the Lord's Supper have the important function within the life of the Church of making visible the boundary between what man can say and understand and to that degree conceive of God, and the inconceivability in which God is in Himself and now really for us Who He is.

"The second boundary of the Creed and dogmatics is quite simply our actual human life in its weakness and in its strength, in its confusion and its clarity, its sinfulness and its hope; the human life from which all the words of the Church are spoken, even there where God Himself gives His witness to the words without them as

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1. Dogmatics, p. 96.

such at any time being able to achieve or to effect it. Much of the criticism and the contempt for dogma and dogmatics would not take place if one wished to make it clear to oneself that human words as such surely serve that purpose, but are finally only able to serve, and that our actual life is placed under the judgment and the grace of God.

"The third boundary is the boundary which separates eternity from time, the coming Kingdom of God from the present aeon, the Last Day from here and now. Without doubt creed and dogmatics are included under Paul's word of I Corinthians, xiii, 8 f., according to which our gnosis and our prophesying are also imperfect work which will come to an end, childish speech which must be done away with when we attain to manhood, a seeing in a darkened mirror which is not yet the seeing face to face. The meaning, nature and task of creed and dogmatics are found in those conditions which will doubtless no longer obtain when God shall be all in all.

"..... Rightly understood the existence of these three boundaries should give a peculiar weight to what has been said concerning creed and dogmatics. Where a boundary exists there is also relation and contact. Creed and dogmatics confront sacrament, human life and the future aeon as distinct from them, but nevertheless

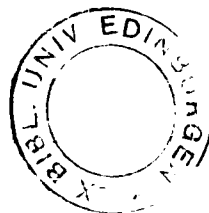
confronting them! Perhaps as Moses in his death faces the Land of Canaan, or as John the Baptist Jesus Christ! Could one utter anything more important about the Creed and dogmatics than just these limitations which are set to them?"<sup>1</sup>

Section 6: Confession of Faith, Scripture and the Word of God.

We have already declared that the problem of all Church Confessions of Faith arise out of the problem of Church proclamation, out of the concern for true and genuine proclamation of the Word of God. We said that the Confession of Faith was always the fighting-action of the Church in her conflict with unbelief, heresy and superstition. We stated that dogmatic work must exist because Church proclamation is fallible human work. But now we must ask the question, Is there no standard higher than the Confessions of Faith or creeds by which the Church may test herself and her proclamation? Is the Confession of Faith which affords "guidance, indications, basic propositions, points of view and limits"<sup>2</sup> for preaching and the administration of the sacraments the last and highest tribunal? Is there no objective, concrete criterion apart from the Church? Is there no

1. Credo, p. 11 f.

2. Dogmatics, p. 97.



Word of God as a concrete entity distinct from the Church? Or is the Church left finally upon and within herself? Is the Church ultimately her own judge and critic? And are her articles of faith, her dogmas just the means which she employs to criticise herself? It is precisely these questions which compel us to define very closely the relation of the Confession of Faith to Scripture and the Word of God. This is the theme which will engage our attention in this section of our chapter.

If there is no Word of God as a concrete entity distinct from the Church, if there is no Word of God in a concrete form standing over against the Church, able and free to judge and test her, then - in this dilemma in which the Church finds herself two possibilities are open to her. First, she can seek and avail herself of other criteria for testing and measuring herself in the absence of the Word of God. Or secondly, she can claim an identification of the Word of God as a criterion with her own nature.

The first of these two possibilities has been followed by modern Protestantism.<sup>1</sup> She has availed herself of philosophical, epistemological, psychological, historical, scientific, ethical and political criteria

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1. Dogmatics, pp. 287-294.

for measuring her proclamation. She has judged herself in terms of the most modern world-view, or of the practical needs and tasks of the moment. She had, it is true, wished to correct and to guide her proclamation. But she had lost the proper criterion for and over against Church proclamation which had been put into her hands by the Reformation. Of course, modern Protestantism was still acquainted with this criterion but she had ceased to regard it as alone authoritative and as distinct and superior to her own activity. And finally as a consequence she "had ceased to envisage the possibility of getting within sight of the Word of God as an entity distinct from Church proclamation."<sup>1</sup> And that gave rise to an unparalleled hunt for new criteria, for new apologetics.<sup>2</sup>

"The second possibility in the dilemma in which we should be placed, if we were not aware of a concrete form of the Word of God as the supreme criterion of Church proclamation, would consist in our having to start from the fact that with her proclamation the Church is practically left to herself and dependent on herself. But, it might now be asked, does that mean that she is without the Word of God and therefore not in a position

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1. Dogmatics, p. 288.

2. Ibid. p. 290.

to control, criticise and correct herself by the Word of God? May not, must not the contraposition of the Word of God and Church proclamation be regarded as a relative one? ..... Is not the reflection in which the Church makes this distinction not the reflection of faith, which by making the distinction simultaneously grasps the divine promise, Lo I am with you alway! and precisely thereby already abrogates the distinction again? Ought not the distinction therefore to end up in a distinction within the reality of the Church herself, in the distinction between the human and the divine element in her reality, both of which elements are yet to be regarded as elements in her reality? Is not the Word of God handed over to her as the Church of Jesus Christ, and is not therefore the missing concrete authority set up and alive in her? Is not this very thing the Church's glory, her Lord's presence in her, namely, that she may and ought on the one hand to proclaim the Word of God and on the other hand herself to regulate, criticise and revise this act of hers by means of the same Word of God?

"In this possibility..... we are faced with the Roman Catholic conception of the relation of the Bible to the Church's teaching office. According to this conception the Church has, of course, one Lord and

Judge of her action, she, of course, has the Word of God over her. But she has it over her because she has it in herself, indistinguishable from herself. The Roman Catholic Church too possesses, reads, in fact reverences the Bible, without prejudice to her setting tradition by its side. But, of course, not the Bible by itself, not an emancipated Bible, not a Bible which confronts the Church as the authority. Here it is not acknowledged that the Bible as it stands is the Word of God and, as such, the supreme criterion of Church doctrine. Here, on the contrary, we are dealing with the Bible authentically interpreted by the Church herself, namely, by her teaching office through which Christ yet liveth and speaketh, with the Bible as belonging to the Church, properly understood, properly expounded, properly applied by her teaching office. It is the Word of God by which all proclamation is to be measured. Thus the regula proxima fidei, the nearest immediate plumb-line of Catholic belief is not the verdict of the Bible, but the Church's teaching office on the Bible. By her actual view of the Bible the Church retains both her proclamation and the norm for its needful criticism, in her own hands, i.e. the Bible rightly understood and rightly applied, which actually is the norm which is applied in such criticism.....



"According to the doctrine of Protestant modernism, too, we find the Church ultimately dependent on herself and left to herself. Here, too, that need not mean that the Church must be without the Word of God."<sup>1</sup> The Church could, and did in fact, retain the Bible but she interpreted it in terms of philosophical presuppositions. It is true there is no infallible teaching office in modern Protestantism as in Roman Catholicism.<sup>2</sup> But that is not the main issue at stake here. "It is rather the presupposed relativity of the opposition between Church and Bible that is essential, the insight into this relativity ascribed to the Church, the capacity ascribed to her of herself determining how far she will let herself be judged by the Bible, and therefore ultimately be herself the judge in her own cause. That is what Protestant modernism does without any infallible teaching office."<sup>3, 4.</sup>

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1. Dogmatics, p. 294 f.

2. Ibid, p. 296.

3. Ibid, p. 296.

4. Martin Luther in his famous polemic On the Babylonish Captivity of the Church (Luther's Primary Works, Wace and Buchheim, 1896, p. 391 f), has expressed the relation of the Church to Scripture. "The Church has no power to establish new Divine promises of grace, as some relentlessly assert,

The net result of these two possibilities which the Church has laid hold of in her forgetfulness of the Bible as the one concrete criterion standing over against

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who say that, since the Church is governed by the Holy Spirit, whatever she ordains has no less authority than that which is ordained by God. The Church is born of the word of promise, through faith, and is nourished and preserved by the same word; that is, she herself is established by the promises of God, not the promise of God by her. The Word of God is incomparably above the Church, and her part is not to establish, ordain or make anything in it, but only to be established, ordained and made as a creature. What man begets his own parent? Who establishes the authority by which he himself exists?

"This power the Church certainly has: that she can distinguish the word of God from the words of men. So Augustine confesses that his motive for believing the Gospel was the authority of the Church, which declared it to be the Gospel. Not that the Church is therefore above the Gospel, for, if so, she would also be above God, in whom we believe, since she declares Him to be God; but, as Augustine says elsewhere, the soul is so taken possession of by the truth that thereby it can judge of all things with the utmost certainty, and yet cannot judge the truth itself, but is compelled to say with an infallible certainty that this is the truth. For example, the mind pronounces with infallible certainty that three and seven are ten, and yet can give no reason why this is true, while it cannot deny that it is true. In fact, the mind is taken possession of, and, having Truth as its judge, is judged rather than judges. Even such a perception is there in the Church, by the illumination of the Spirit, in judging and approving of doctrines, a perception which she cannot demonstrate, but which she holds as most sure."

her is "the grandiose loneliness of the Church of the present."<sup>1</sup> Alone with herself she hears only her own voice echoing hollowly in her ears, now perhaps a little more tediously than formerly. Alone with herself, her own judgments, words and thoughts she speaks "as the scribes and Pharisees and not with authority". She speaks, and the people hear the unbroken, undialectical, unsanctified word of man. Unable to understand that her ancient symbols were expressions of a knowledge of the final, absolute and sole authority of the Scriptures, she now speaks in the form of pronouncements, declarations, resolutions which proceed invariably from other presuppositions than that of the pure Word of God alone. Hence, it is becoming increasingly evident, if not to the Church herself, then certainly to those without, that she is uttering no word which has first come to her from Beyond, but which on the contrary, proceeds from her emptiness, her nakedness and her loneliness! And it is precisely because she refuses to acknowledge the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the only source, criterion, authority and power over her that she is incapable of making any headway with the old formulae or of confessing her

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1. Dogmatics, p. 294.

faith anew to-day in the face of heresy. She still persists in purifying herself by herself'.

The Scriptural principle of the Reformation is just this affirmation of the Bible as the only concrete, objective authority and criterion of the Church. "At their very beginnings the Reformed Churches saw that truth is contained only in the Word of God, that the Word of God for them lay only in the Old and New Testaments, and that every doctrine must therefore be measured against an unchangeable and impassable standard discoverable in the Scriptures. What one may be moved to say concerning God, the world, and man because he must say it, having let the Scriptures speak to him - the Scriptures themselves, and not the Scriptures interpreted by any particular tradition; the whole Scriptures, and not a part of them chosen to suit a preconceived theory; the Scriptures, and not the utterances of pious men of the past or present which might be confused with them; the Scriptures, and not without the significant Word of the Spirit which sustains them - what, after those Scriptures have spoken to him, one may be moved to say in fear and trembling concerning the things <sup>about</sup> which man of himself may say nothing, or only foolishness, that, if we may judge from our beginnings, is Reformed doctrine.

Doctrina is the word of the Christian man at crisis with the word of God: it is penetrated by that merciless purifying and cleansing which is witnessed to in the Scriptures. It remains the word of man. It does not itself become the verbum divinum, but in this relation it is none the less a legitimate and pure praedicatio verbi divini."<sup>1</sup> It is this principle of conformity to the Scriptures which renders all creeds, rules of faith and Confessions subordinate, derivative and secondary standards.

The Reformation scriptural principle of the written Word of God as the one concrete authority and criterion of the Church apart and distinct from herself cannot be proved. To be able to prove it we should obviously be in a position above proclamation and the Bible. "The Bible whose supremacy we had the power to prove would not be the free Bible which by being free constitutes a real authority, but obviously it would be a Bible already interpreted in a definite way, a Bible made our own and thus become an instrument in our own hands and to that extent, for all its perhaps demonstrable supremacy, still also merely an element within the Church of the day which we ourselves constitute."<sup>2</sup> The belief

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1. Word of God and Word of Man, p. 240 f.

2. Dogmatics, p. 297.

that the Bible requires to be proven, or at least substantiated as the Word of God over against the Church is the error of fundamentalism, or rational orthodoxy. All attempts, however, to prove the Bible the veritable Word of God are indicative of a lack of faith in the Word itself, in the self-sufficiency of its self-evidencing power.<sup>1</sup>

The Bible has never completely lost the significance of a relative authority at least within the Church, and as such it has always been a guilty conscience, a disturbing factor to the Church.<sup>2</sup> "The Bible has found and the Bible finds utterance in the Church. Therefore the possibility is not ruled out that it might find utterance over against the Church."<sup>3</sup> The existence of the Bible in the Church is a sign, in the answer to which it might happen that the man in the Church is called to faith, that is, to a hearing of the Word of God unimpeded by the Church herself.<sup>4</sup> "The happening of this event, the event of faith, we cannot take for granted. We can only relate ourselves to this event,

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1. Dogmatics, p. 32.

2. Ibid. p. 298.

3. Ibid. p. 298.

4. Ibid. p. 298 f.

so far as it is the content of the promise given to the Church - we might also say, of the command given to the Church. We cannot speak about this event when it is there being fulfilled, but only in recollection and expectation. Because this event will take place in accordance with the promise, because the Church is to be the Church of Jesus Christ, the Bible will be heard as the Word of God. It is to this fulfilment to come of the promise received that we relate ourselves. The Word of God is the speech, the act, the mystery of God, and so not a substance immanent in the Church apart from the event of its being spoken and believed, or discoverable or demonstrable in her..... The presumption of the presence of faith would dissolve the sign (of the Bible) as such into a directly visible and palpable datum. This datum being presumed, the Bible might then be regarded directly as the Word of God. This datum, together with faith or faith together with this datum, would then constitute the proof that the Bible is the Word of God."<sup>1</sup> It is significant that the assumption that faith is already present, a faith from which and to which we can argue, is characteristic of Roman Catholicism and modern Protestantism. By means of this presumption a proof is made possible that the Word of God is not over the Church but in the

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1. Dogmatics. p. 299 f.

Church.<sup>1</sup>

"The Word of God is not susceptible of any proof, not even and least of all of this proof by faith present in the Church. With the conclusion, Because I believe and because for me as a believer the Bible is the Word of God, therefore and to that extent it is God's Word - with this conclusion it is all up with the divinity of the Word of God, it is no longer regarded as the Word standing over the Church, directed to the Church."<sup>2</sup> The Bible itself creates faith. It grants ears to hear it. It attests itself in the Church. It brings with it its own power of conviction. It is, with the Spirit, self-evidencing truth. Accordingly the Westminster Confession of Faith declares: "The authority of the holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed and obeyed, dependeth not upon the testimony of any man or Church, but wholly upon God (who is truth itself), the Author thereof; and therefore it is to be received because it is the Word of God."<sup>3</sup> And the following two passages leave us in no doubt whatever.

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1. Dogmatics, p. 300.

2. Ibid. p. 300.

3. The Westminster Confession of Faith, Chap. I, Sec. IV.



"The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself; and therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture (which is not manifold, but one), it must be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly."<sup>1</sup>

"The Supreme Judge by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits are to be examined and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other than the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture."<sup>2</sup> The Scotch Confession of Faith of 1560 confesses a free Bible in its own quaint language. "We affirme, therefore, that sik as allege the Scripture to have na uther authoritie bot that quhilk it has received from the Kirk, to be blasphemous against God, and injurious to the trew Kirk, quhilk alwaies heares and obeyis the voice of her awin Spouse and Pastor; bot takis not upon her to be maistres over the samin."<sup>3</sup>

Since the Bible, wholly independent of us, is, in the freedom of God the sole judge of the Church, the

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1. The Westminster Confession of Faith, Chap.I, Sec.IX.

2. Ibid. Chap.I, Sec.X.

3. The Scotch Confession of Faith of 1560, Article XIX.

Church can only acknowledge the fact. She can only desire to draw attention to the Bible, to make room for the Bible to speak for itself. This the Church does in her interpretation and exposition of the Scriptures.<sup>1</sup> The Confession of Faith, then, is strictly interpretation of Scripture. "Already the original confession: Jesus the Christ! Jesus the Lord! was nothing other than an interpretation of the Old Testament Messiah prophecies. Similarly the Reformation Confessions wanted to confess Jesus as Lord of the Church, and at the same time to oppose the errors of the time only as interpretations of the Scriptures. It is just in this relation and connection that the authority and the norm of ecclesiastical Confessions are grounded.... It is a relative, and that means, a limited and preliminary authority and norm. Limited: because the Confession can and should refer as a witness to Christ, and that means as an interpretation of the Scriptures. But it can not desire to replace either Christ or the Scriptures; it cannot, as it is written in the Formula of Concord, wish to be the judge, the norm and the rule."<sup>2</sup> Its authority and norm

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1. Dogmatics, p. 302.

2. We have deemed it advisable to give in full the pertinent sections of The Formula of Concord,

are preliminary because it can be abrogated and improved..... In the introduction which the Berne Synod

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from which Barth here quotes. The translations are from P. Schaff, Creeeds of the Evangelical Protestant Churches, p. 93 f. "I. We believe, confess, and teach that the only rule and norm, according to which all dogmas and all doctors ought to be esteemed and judged, is no other whatever than the prophetic and apostolic writings both of the Old and New Testament, as it is written (cxix 105): 'Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path'. And St. Paul saith (Gal. i, 8): 'Though an angel from heaven preach any other gospel unto you, let him be accursed'.

"But other writings, whether of the fathers or of the moderns, with whatever name they come, are in nowise to be equalled with the Scriptures, but are all to be esteemed inferior to them, so that they be not otherwise received than in the rank of witnesses, to show what doctrine was taught after the Apostles' times also, and in what parts of the world that more sound doctrine of the prophets and apostles has been preserved..

"The other symbols and other writings do not possess the authority of a judge - for this dignity belongs to Holy Scripture alone; but merely give testimony to our religion, and set it forth to show in what manner from time to time the Holy Scriptures have been understood and explained in the Church of God by the doctors who then lived, as respects controverted articles, and by what arguments, dogmas at variance with the Holy Scriptures have been rejected and condemned."

addressed to the magistrates we read: "Where anything is brought to our attention by our clergy or by others that leads us nearer to Christ and more efficaciously proclaims God's Word for common friendship and Christian love than does the meaning here set forth, we will gladly accept the same, desiring not to hinder the course of the Holy Spirit which is not in subjection to the flesh but always presses forward to the image of Christ Jesus'.<sup>1</sup> Within these borders and subordinate to the Scriptures the Confession of a Church has precisely that spiritual value which it in fact has, and it enjoys that spiritual respect which it actually secures. The actual spiritual value of the Confessions of the

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1. It is most significant that The First Confession of Basle, published 1534, is "the only Reformed Confession which does not begin with the assertion of the Bible principle, but it concludes with the noteworthy sentence: 'We submit this our Confession to the judgment of the divine Scriptures, and hold ourselves ready always thankfully to obey God and His Word if we should be corrected out of the said Holy Scriptures'." See P. Schaff, History of the Creeds of Christendom, p. 387. As a matter of fact, this statement is not quite accurate. Neither the Confessio Scoticana nor the Heidelberg Catechism begin with the Scriptural principle. It is correct to say that The First Confession of Basle is the only one which does not contain an assertion of the Scriptural principle.

old Church proved itself, for example, in that the Reformation Churches did not wish to confess without having made the confessions expressly their own. And again the actual spiritual value of the Reformation Confessions proved themselves, for example, in the authority which they have won anew in the present Church conflict in Germany. That the Confession of a Church has binding power upon itself in the present and even in the future, but also as a question to other churches, yes and to the ecclesiastically neutral environment as well - that lies in the nature of the thing! How should a Church make satisfaction for the claim of Jesus Christ, how should it witness to God's intervention without this claim being audible and this intervention being perceptible wherever the Confession is heard? If an ecclesiastical Confession has the force of this demand and this attack, there is no reason why it should not contend for it. But as a matter of principle this obligation and this power is not to be systematically circumscribed. One cannot postulate that a Confession has this power. Certainly one can not guarantee this power either by Church law, or even by a law of the State. In Matthew x, 12 f, there is the question whether an house is worthy of the apostolic

greetings and confession. There is, however, also the question, directed to the Church, whether it has really been the apostolic greeting which has been given with its confession. There are Confessions of Faith such as the Helvetic Consensus Formula of 1675 to which one may truly put this question. Whenever it is a case of a Confession having no or little binding power, it will be recommended that both these questions should be considered."<sup>1</sup>

The Westminster Confession of Faith confesses that the books of the Old and New Testament "are given by inspiration of God, to be the rule of Faith and life".<sup>2</sup> It would therefore, be "incorrect to say: the Confession of Faith is the law or the norm of doctrine or of life. Law or norm in the Church is the Scriptures alone, not dogma, not a Confession of Faith. The Confession of Faith is a commentary on the law, affording direction. Its binding power is lacking when the law itself punishes the commentary because of its falsity, or when knowledge of the law itself no longer takes place. For so is the definition of the dogmatist, Franz Turretini: Confessiones non possunt

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1. Theologische Existenz heute, No. 29, Das Bekenntnis der Reformation und unser Bekennen, p. 12 f.

2. Chap. I, Sec. II.

obligare in foro interno conscientiae, nisi in quantum deprehenduntur convenire cum verbi Dei, quod solum vim habet conscientiam obligandi.<sup>1</sup> No legalistic, ecclesiastical binding nor inner binding of the minister and the congregation counteracts the event of a Confession of Faith. Consequently the 'Confessional stand' of a Reformed Church is to be understood fundamentally quite differently than that of the Lutheran. It is to be understood as inflexible only theologically, that means, only with respect to that insight which is given by God in His revelation. One must not denote it as inflexible so soon as one regards it as that act between God and man which cannot be conceived legalistically. The Confession of Faith offers to the Church little outward protection, and ultimately none at all, against a penetrating deterioration. The power of its origin in the Holy Scriptures is also the power of its lasting confirmation and operation. Ultimately it has no other power. But this it has!"<sup>2</sup>

#### Section 7: The Confession and Exegesis.

A little while ago we declared that the Confession of Faith is strictly interpretation of the Scriptures,

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1. Cited by Barth from Heppe, Die Dogmatik der evangelisch-reformierten Kirche, p. 504.
  2. die Theologie und die Kirche, p. 84.

Interpretation of the Scriptures, however, inevitably raises the much debated question of Biblical exegesis and historical criticism. Our attitude towards them, and the answer which we must now make concerning them, will obviously play a decisive role in our conception of the relation of the Church and her articles of faith to Holy Writ. "Because the Creed is subordinate to the Scriptures, dogmatics is continually faced with the task of correcting it (the Creed and all Confessions of Faith) by means of exegesis. Therefore, we must be agreed as to what we mean by exegesis. Exegesis, which is so to speak predisposed to dogmatics, must be an attempt to understand the Holy Scriptures within the sphere of the Church. It must therefore be theological exegesis. By that I understand interpretation and explanation of the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as prophetic-apostolic Scriptures, and therefore an interpretation and explanation which keeps in mind the question which is to be put to the prophets and apostles: in how far is a witness to God's Word given to us here in this text? Theological exegesis is exegesis which occurs under a quite definite presupposition, namely, first, that the reader of the Old and New Testaments recalls that up until the present the Church has heard God's Word in this book, and secondly, that



in this book the reader or scholar reads in the expectation that he himself may also hear God's Word again for his time. The place of theological exegesis is midway between this recollection and this expectation corresponding to the time of the Church between the Ascension and the Second Coming of Christ. Therefore, exegesis which is the norm for dogmatics is no so-called presuppositionless exegesis. There is no such thing. The supposed "presuppositionlessness" of which a certain Gnosis used to boast itself means only this, that just here another presupposition is established. Concretely this means that here God's revelation is not reckoned with but that one is able to take up a neutral position towards that to which these Scriptures point, in the same way in which it is possible to be neutral toward other things. This neutrality, this unconcernedness for God's revelation, and therefore this "presuppositionlessness" is a presupposition just like any other. We must methodically choose which of these presuppositions is to be valid, and of course, in the Church only one can be considered as meaningful and pertinent. If there is a Church there is also a canon to be read corresponding to the Church; that is, with this recollection and this expectation. Observe carefully that in all that I have said I have not mentioned

the pretentious word 'pneumatic exegesis'. I am quite satisfied with the demand for a theological exegesis.

"Such theological exegesis is the criterion of all propositions of dogmatics. And obviously it is also the criterion with which even the Creed and all Confessions of Faith of the Church have already been measured in the past and ever again must be measured. The Reformation scriptural principle must remain fundamentally in force along the whole line of dogmatics. If it should really happen that such theological exegesis deemed it necessary to strike out a certain part of the Creed (Virgin Birth, Resurrection?), then there would be nothing else to do but to follow this summons. But the demand to strike out of the Creed the resurrection of Christ could only be made by a very untheological exegesis. A theological exegesis will grant without further ceremony that the resurrexit tertia die stands in the centre of the New Testament witness in such a way that one can say: this witness stands or falls with this assertion. It is indeed true that a theological exegesis will not say that the Ascension and the Virgin Birth stand in the centre of the New Testament witness. Nevertheless they do stand in a very remarkable way on the borders of it. The Virgin Birth is assuredly surrounded by a noteworthy question-mark.

It is therefore to be treated correspondingly in dogmatics. I hope that you will recall that in my lectures I not only expressed myself very positively here but also how and in what connection (res und signum!) I have done so.<sup>1</sup> I have determined to keep to the Virgin Birth because I established that here in the New Testament a kind of signal is given which was important enough for the Old Church to be taken up into her Creed. In the sense in which I have lectured upon the Virgin Birth, I believe that it can be justified before the claims of a theological exegesis. I cannot, therefore, accept the objection that I am thereby lacking in a theological exegesis. In fact, I must register the counter-question whether an exegesis which believes it is permitted to strike out the Virgin Birth should not be designated as untheological exegesis?"<sup>2</sup>

"In principle, biblical exegesis can only be interpretation of the text which the Holy Scriptures offer. It cannot be the desire to go behind the witness of this text. On the contrary, in explaining, it repeats what the witness itself says, what the prophets and apostles testify of the 'great deeds of God'..... But there is also an untheological exegesis. There is

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1. In the seventh lecture on the Credo, pp. 57-65, Barth contended for the article "Qui conceptus est de Spiritu sancto, natus ex Maria virgine."

2. Credo, p. 153 f.

the great attempt of modern historical science (Geschichtswissenschaft). Under this caption I understand the attempt to arrive at the 'essence' of the accounts of a past event by means of the most practical process of elimination possible of all that which constitutes the share the narrators themselves play in these reports. That means that what has been done and experienced by men now forms the object of these accounts. And the attempt is made to extricate this object through the application of the categories of historical relation and historical analogy. The report will be measured according to these categories. They are the criterion, or rather the law of probability, by which the accounts are to be distinguished and valued. Afterwards the account will be designated as history, or as myth, saga or legend. If the report does not correspond to the criteria, then the historian speaks of myth, saga or legend. In modern historical science it is a matter of calculating the probability which is based upon a quite definitely restricted conception of truth. The intervention of the God Who witnesses to Himself in history and Who acts in history is not anticipated under its categories. Nevertheless, in principle there is nothing to prevent the application of the method of historical science to the Bible. The Bible

is also a document humain. That is not to be denied. And the resultant consequences of it are in no way simply to be deplored. Why should the method of historical science not be able to perform its quite definite service in the research and interpretation of the Scripture? Theological exegesis could also learn certain things from it. Nor is it perceived why the method of historical science should come to a halt before the doors of the theological faculty. Why should it not be made to perform a service for theological exegesis? Certainly - so long as it does not claim that the method itself is exegesis! It can only be a particular method among others which are applied to the Bible. As such it can render a pure service precisely with its 'atheistic' character. The Bible is a human document in the midst of the whole history of religion. Modern historical science opens up to us the possibility of understanding this human thing as human, and then precisely so as witness, in a way in which it had not then been offered to the Reformers. - Problems naturally arise at this point. The method of modern historical science cannot be identical with theological exegesis because it must always ask the question concerning the human event as such. And when it is not regarded as such it will have to be restrained

with positive assertions. Furthermore, it is not permitted to be satisfied with a mere explanation of the text; it must desire to push on from the text to the thing itself. Consequently the theologian stands in a different position to a chapter from Matthew's Gospel, or even from St. John's, than does the historian. For him the text as such is the decisive thing. The historian, detached from the text, will accordingly ask 'how it has been'. Collisions between theological exegesis and historical science do not occur when historical science acknowledges the content of a text as historical. The situation becomes different when the historian thinks that he is obliged to speak of 'saga' or 'legend'. I should think that no reason is here given why the theologian should protest.<sup>1</sup>

Obviously the two conceptions mean first of all only this: that we are here concerned about accounts of an event which, as a human event, is problematical, and

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1. Barth makes a sharp distinction between three categories, namely, history, saga or legend, and myth. For a complete exposition of these in their relation to exegesis see the Dogmatics, p. 375 f. Cf. the Romans, English Transl. pp. 145-148, for exposition of Biblical history. And for a further statement of Biblical exegesis see the prefaces to the second and third editions of the Romans.

which is difficult if not impossible to imagine by human thought under the application of the categories of relation and analogy, and therefore under the presupposition of that restricted conception of truth. Had the theologians of the 19th century not succumbed to the historical way of thinking but had simply remained by the wisdom of the Fathers, "It stands written"! then the whole situation between exegesis and historical science would not have become difficult. Strictly speaking, the protest of the theologian can only be instituted there where the historian speaks of "myth". An account which is understood as a "myth" is in no sense grounded in an event, not in the event of something having been said. On the contrary, what we have here are pictures of human phantasy, a speculation about God and man. Theology must see that with the introduction of the idea of myth her presupposition is attacked. Here it can only reject the historical method. The conversation between exegesis and historical science can nevertheless continue. As is well known the most interesting conversations often take place when people are no longer talking to one another! Accordingly the theologian may well ask the historian whether the reason why he finds so many myths in the Bible does not lie in the fact that he himself is an

all-too mythical thinker. For thought has scarcely never been so mythical as it has been in the 19th and 20th centuries..... and so on.

"We should not be surprised to meet continually in the Bible texts which are unable to hold their ground against the conception of truth of historical science, and which the historian will only be able to designate as "saga" or "legend". But just these texts draw our attention to the fact that in the Bible one is concerned not merely with an event but with the event of the great deeds of God! Qualiter? totaliter aliter than every other event! Nothing more, then, is to be said, and I will be on my guard, for example, against adding a word to what stands there. An explanation, a making visible in an historical sense: that must be excluded here."<sup>1</sup>

Because Biblical exegesis occupies a position above all creeds and Confessions of Faith in that it remains the criterion by which they are measured, we cannot too strongly emphasize the grave peril in which exegesis itself stands. It is the same danger which we have already noted in another connection, namely, that the Bible is absorbed by the Church and thereby annulled

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1. Credo, p. 160 f.



by it. "Exegesis is always a combination of taking and giving, of expounding and inserting..... All exegesis may become predominantly an imposition instead of an exposition, and to that extent deteriorate into a dialogue of the Church with herself. And we shall not banish this danger, but only begin to conjure it up and render it acute, by making right exposition depend on the verdict of an ultimately decisive Church teaching office, or on the verdict of an historical and critical science, comporting itself with an equal infallibility..... Bible exegesis should rather be left open on all sides, not, as this demand was put by Liberalism, for the sake of free thinking, but for the sake of a free Bible."<sup>1</sup> Prayer and the life of faith are ultimately the Church's only hope of deliverance from this danger which threatens her exegesis of Scripture.

#### Section 8: The Canon.

What precisely are the Scriptures which are the subject-matter of theological exegesis, the writings which are the supreme and only authority and criterion of the Church? This question must now be answered if we are to avoid identifying early Church creeds, Confessions of Faith, dogmas and traditions with these unique and special writings themselves. Unless the

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1. Dogmatics, p. 119.

Scriptures are very precisely defined, there might quite conceivably exist the danger of the distinction between them and the Church's own writings being obliterated, or even of the Church's dogmas being added to and included in Scripture. Moreover as we have already seen, without a very definite set of writings the concrete criterion which exists apart from the Church would scarcely be distinguishable. Hence, there is the necessity for the Canon of Scripture of the Old and New Testaments, containing the word of the prophets and apostles.<sup>1</sup> It is no begging of the question to maintain immediately that the Bible itself constitutes <sup>itself</sup> the canon. "The canon is such because it has imposed itself as such upon the Church and invariably does so. The Church's recollection of God's past revelation has computed that the Bible is her object, because, as a matter of fact, this and no other object is the promise of future divine revelation, which can make her proclamation a duty upon the Church, and give her the courage and the joy for this duty. If we thought we could specify why this is so, we should once more be acting as if we had a measure in our hands with which we were in a position to measure the Bible, and on the basis of it to assign it its distinctive position. In

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1. Dogmatics, p. 113 f.

that case our final and decisive wisdom would once more be the wisdom of a self-dialogue, although of a self-dialogue concerned with the Bible. No, the Bible is the canon just because it is so. But it is so just because it imposes itself as such."<sup>1</sup> And the event of this imposition is the content of the Bible, which is Jesus Christ the Word of God. "Search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me." (John 5, 39)<sup>2</sup>

The difference between the Confessions of Faith which are to be found in Scripture and those which originated at a later date in the Church's history is just the canon. The Confessions of Nathaniel (John i, 49), of Peter (Matt. xvi, 16), of Thomas (John xx, 28) and of the eunuch (Acts viii, 37) differ from the Confessions of the Early Church and the Reformers in that they belong to the Canon. They form a part of

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1. Dogmatics, p. 120 f.

2. It is not our task to set forth the Doctrine of the Word of God and of Holy Scripture. To say more than we have would be to undergo the risk of saying too little. At this point it must be recognized that the doctrine of the Confession of Faith can only be properly and thoroughly understood against a background of a knowledge of the doctrine of the Word of God, and concretely of Volume I, Part I of the Dogmatics.

the criterion of those articles of faith which the Church has in faith derived from the criterion itself. The Chalcedonian and Nicene creeds with their doctrines of the two natures are to be distinguished from the confession which appears in I Corinthians, viii, 16, namely, "But to us there is but one God the Father, of Whom are all things, and we (for) in Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by Whom are all things and we by Him", by the fact that they are interpretations of Scripture, analyses of such Biblical statements.<sup>1</sup> They are the work of the Church, documents explaining how she understands such statements, or their object, i.e. how she understands God.<sup>2</sup> Confessions of Faith are "documents of how the Church struggles against error and for the relevancy of her proclamation, a document of her theology and to that extent a document of her faith and only to that extent, only indirectly, a document of revelation itself".<sup>3</sup> The text of the doctrine of the Trinity, for example, which is one proposition of a Confession of Faith, is not identical with a single bit of the text of the Bible witness to revelation. "The text of the doctrine of the Trinity is throughout connected with texts in the Bible witness to revelation,

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1. Dogmatics, p. 354.

2. Ibid. p. 354.

3. Ibid. p. 354.

it includes also certain concepts taken from the text, but it does so just as an interpretation does, i.e. it translates and expounds that text, and that, e.g., involves its availing itself of other concepts than those contained in the text before it."<sup>1</sup>

The difference which we have described between the Canon of Scripture and the Church's articles of faith corresponds to the difference in the times in which they were respectively written and formulated. "There is the time of the direct, original utterance of God Himself in His revelation, the time of Jesus Christ - (which, according to John viii, 56, was also and already the time of Abraham) - the time of that which prophets and apostles heard, in order to attest it. Another time is the time of this testimony, the time of prophecy and the apostolate, the time of Peter upon whom Christ builds His Church, the time when the Canon arose as the concrete counterpart in which the Church receives her norm for all things. And thirdly, there is this or that time of the Church herself, the time of derivative proclamation, related to the words of the prophets and apostles and regulated by them. These are different times, distinguished not only by the difference in periods and in contents, not only by the remoteness of

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1. Dogmatics, p. 354.

centuries and the gap in humanity between centuries and millenia, but distinguished by the varied attitude of God to men..... Our situation in the Church is a third and quite special situation. It is that, the variety in order of before and after, above and below, which makes the times of the Word of God so varied. Three times it is a matter of an utterance of the Word of God by the mouth of man. But only twice, in the case of the Biblical witness and of ourselves, is it also primarily a matter of submitting to an utterance, and only once, in our own case, of an indirect submission to it mediated through the Bible."<sup>1</sup> Thus the Church symbols, as derivative articles of faith and related to the prophets and apostles, belong to the time of the Church herself as distinct from the time of the Canon of Scripture. "The Church is the existence form of the Kingdom of Christ in the time between

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1. Dogmatics, p. 164 f. See pages 164-170 for a defence of this doctrine of the three times in the face of modern philosophies of history. The importance of the teaching concerning the three times, or dispensations, as the older theologians used to call it, is seen in Barth's assertion that if we drop the orderly variety of the three times, we must drop the concept of the Word of God itself (p. 167). Our special interest here, however, is to note that the symbols of the Church belong to a time which distinguishes them from other revelatory writings.

His Ascension and His Second Coming; in the time therefore in which He is not more present to those who are His than He was to His disciples and apostles in the forty days after Easter. Nor is He yet present as He will be in the revealed and completed glory of His Kingdom."<sup>1</sup> Confessions of Faith and dogma therefore lie within the time determined by these two events. According to Luther, the Ascension of Christ and His sitting at the right hand of God the Father means that the regnum Christi in the world is doctrinale regnum, ministerium Verbi. The fact of Christ's Ascension means that for us obedience to Christ is obedience to the Scriptures. The Ascension places the Church and her Articles of Faith in strict subordination to Holy Writ. Christ rules His Church through His Word, the Scriptures. Christ is present with His people in and with the Scriptures.

Section. 9: The Confession and Dogma.

Barth makes an important distinction between dogmas, dogmatics and dogma, in order to distinguish between the evangelical conception of dogma and the Roman Catholic conception on the one hand, and that of

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1. Theologische Existenz heute, No. 27, Die Kirche und die Kirchen, p. 12.

modern Protestantism on the other. "Dogmas are the doctrinal propositions acknowledged and confessed by the Church which are deposited in the Church symbols."<sup>1</sup> But dogmas, in this sense, are not dogma. "Dogma is the agreement of Church proclamation with the revelation attested in Holy Scripture."<sup>2</sup> Under no circumstances dare we claim that the dogmas - the doctrinal propositions of our Creeds and Confessions - are the agreement of the Church's proclamation with the Word of God. A theology which asserted that its dogmas (its Confession) were directly and obviously proclamation of the Word of God would be a theologia gloriae,<sup>3</sup> and not a theologia crucis. If one could exhibit the agreement of dogmas with the Word of God, then along with the ecclesia militans dogmatics would be at an end and the Kingdom of God would have dawned.<sup>4</sup> There have been at least four conceptions of dogma in the past. First, in the colloquial usage of heathen antiquity, but also the Greek OT and NT, the word "dogma" meant primarily a behest, a statute, a decree; e.g. The "law of the Medes and Persians", mentioned in

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1. Dogmatics, p. 305.

2. Ibid. p. 304.

3. Ibid. p. 308.

4. Ibid. p. 309.



Dan 6:16, because of which Daniel is put into the lion's den, is a dogma; the command which, according to Luke 2:1, went forth from Caesar Augustus, is a dogma; according to Ephes. 2:15, Col. 2:14, the decrees of the Old Testament laws are dogmas. But there is also a second meaning of the word in antiquity to be considered, that of a doctrinal proposition in philosophy, or in a science generally, emanating from an individual teacher, a school, or movement; and it is apparently with more of the latter than of the former significance that the word, almost always used in the plural to signify Christian truths, has by the second century (first in Ignatius of Antioch Ad Magn. 13 ) passed over into the usage primarily of the Greek Church. But Cyprian, Tertullian, Ambrose, Augustine, Leo the Great and Gregory the Great were still unacquainted with it in this significance or did not wish to use it; in fact as late as Thomas Aquinas it is seldom used with this meaning. Thirdly, dogmas have meant the false doctrines of heathens and heretics. Barth suggests that this is the only conception Augustine knew! But ever since the 16th century the word apparently has come into currency with special emphasis on the second meaning mentioned (in the sense of dogma fidei, dogma catholicum, dogma Ecclesiae). At all events it is from this point of

view that theological efforts begin in the Roman Catholic Church to define the concept. The result of them is summarised by A. Deneffe, S.J., (Dogma, Wort und Begriff, Scholastik, 1931), in agreement with Diekamp and Bartmann, in the proposition, Dogma est veritas a Deo formaliter revelata et ab Ecclesia sive solemniter (by an ex cathedra decision or conciliar decree) sive ordinarie (by the fact that it is generally taught in the Church without opposition) definita.<sup>1</sup>

It is, by the way, a shocking fact that in modern Protestantism the concept of dogma, either as the agreement existing between Church proclamation and the Word of God or as veritates a Deo formaliter revelatae, is not taken seriously at all. Indeed, dogma is scarcely dealt with, and never in connection with a concrete objective authority either beside or above the Church. The attitude to dogma, and hence to Confessions, on the part of modern Protestant theologians is expressed by Professor John Baillie in his The Interpretation of Religion. At the outset he defines theology "as the science of religion - the science, that is, which selects religion as its special object of study".<sup>2</sup> That which distinguishes this science from other natural sciences is that it is a Geisteswissenschaft.<sup>3</sup> Near the end of his book, Professor Baillie raises the problem of the criterion of truth and falsity in religion and solves it in these words. "The criterion of truth and falsity in religion can be nothing else than the extent of the satisfaction to our moral consciousness. The only question we can relevantly ask ourselves about any religious creed or dogma is this: How far does it seem to be

1. Dogmatics, p. 305.

2. John Baillie: The Interpretation of Religion, p.3.

3. Ibid. p. 4 and 5.

inspired by, to harmonize with, and effectively to carry into its own transcendent region, those values which our consciences declare to be deepest and noblest on earth? And Christianity can lay no other claim to be the highest and truest religion in the world than just that it envisages the Divine in terms of what we think ourselves able to discern to be the highest values revealed to us in our human intercourse with one another."<sup>1</sup> Here the moral consciousness (ignoring, of course, the fact of a fallen creation and the depravity of man) is equated with the Word of God, and true dogma is that which corresponds to it. Of course, Professor Baillie operates with the notion of general revelation in which Christianity is one religion among many. The uniqueness of the Christian revelation is, in fact, dismissed even when the Gospel is admitted to be different from and better than all other religions. To W. R. Matthews, another representative of modern Protestantism, dogma is not a serious reality. For "the main function of theology," he writes, "is to act as an intermediary between philosophy and revelation".<sup>2</sup> "Changes of scientific theory produce their first reaction in philosophy," he continues, "and hence ultimately upon religious thought..... The theologian is not engaged upon precisely the same problems as the philosopher nor does he follow the same method. He starts with some data and is concerned primarily with their interpretation. He begins with a 'revelation', an experience of God which he accepts as giving the law to his thinking. But like all data and experience, it needs to be understood, to be thought out and brought into some harmonious relation with the rest of accepted truth."<sup>3</sup> Dogmas, then, we may infer from this statement, are religious propositions which either relate or are related to our accepted truth. Accepted truth is the current scientific and philosophical views. In other passages in his book, Matthews makes the "Christian Experience" the norm for doctrine. And in modern theology, where experience is taken to be the norm of doctrine, dogmas become explications of the religious self-consciousness. Such theology has for its father

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1. John Baillie, The Interpretation of Religion, p. 408 f.
  2. W. R. Matthews, God in Christian Thought and Experience, p. 91.
  3. Ibid. p. 92.

## Friedrich Schleiermacher.

For Schleiermacher dogmas or doctrines are "accounts of the Christian religious affections set forth in speech".<sup>1</sup> "Dogmatic Theology is the science which systematizes the doctrine prevalent in a Christian Church at a given time."<sup>2</sup> And, in connection with the Church, "the piety which forms the basis of all ecclesiastical communions is, considered purely in itself, neither a Knowing nor a Doing, but a modification of Feeling, or of immediate self-consciousness."<sup>3</sup> "The common element in all howsoever diverse expressions of piety..... is this: the consciousness of our absolute dependence, or, which is the same thing, of our relation with God."<sup>4</sup> Accordingly, in Schleiermacher dogma is neither veritates a Deo formaliter revelatae, as is the Roman position, nor the agreement between Church proclamation and the Word of God. It is rather the explication of the piety of a society, the essence of which is absolute dependence. But there is still a second notion of dogma which may be derived from Schleiermacher, who, it should be observed, did have a regal respect for the Church and her symbols, in spite of the fact that his definition of her communion was along the lines of general principles of the philosophy and psychology of religion. Concerning the formation of the Dogmatic System, Schleiermacher tells us: "All propositions which claim a place in an epitome of Christian doctrine must approve themselves both by appeal to Evangelical (Protestant) confessional documents, or in default of these, to the New Testament Scriptures, and by exhibition of their homogeneity with other propositions already recognized."<sup>5</sup> This statement is in strict harmony with the following: "In order to build up a system of doctrine, it is necessary first to

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1. Friedrich Schleiermacher, The Christian Faith in Outline, para. 15.
  2. Ibid. para. 19.
  3. Ibid. para. 3.
  4. Ibid. para. 4.
  5. Ibid. para. 27.

eliminate from the totality of the dogmatic material everything that is heretical, and to retain only what is ecclesiastical,"<sup>1</sup> and "Dogmatic propositions have a twofold value, an ecclesiastical and a scientific".<sup>2</sup> Here dogma may be inferred to be the agreement of the explication of the present religious consciousness of the community (the Church) and the explication of the religious consciousness of the past. For, if we rightly understand Schleiermacher, the old Confessions and even the Scriptures were explications of the piety of the Church in the past. It will thus be seen that the Old Confessions and the Scriptures can only be authoritative for dogmas and doctrines in the present only in so far as they coincide with the present religious consciousness. Schleiermacher would not describe the Old Confessions as veritates a Deo formaliter revelatae as the Roman Church does. Nevertheless against him may be urged the criticism which Barth makes here. "In dogmas there speaks the Church of the past - venerable, worthy of respect, authoritative, non sine Deo, as befits her - but the Church; she defines (i.e. circumscribes in dogmas) revealed truth, the Word of God. And thereby out of the Word of God comes the word of man, not unworthy of notice

1. Friedrich Schleiermacher, The Christian Faith in Outline, para 21.
2. Ibid. para. 17. It is interesting to note that in his exposition of para. 27 Schleiermacher states: "The direct appeal to Scripture is only necessary either when the use which the confessional documents make of the New Testament books (note just the New Testament) cannot be approved of, or when propositions of the confessional documents do not themselves seem sufficiently scriptural or Protestant, and these must be superannuated and other expressions substituted." (The Christian Faith, Engl. Transl. p. 113). This passage only serves to confirm the contention we have made. Here Scripture is not the point from which the Word goes out demanding a word of man, dogmas, doctrine in response to it in the present concrete situation. Nor is Scripture the insistent demand upon the Church to be critical of her speech. Rather it would seem that there is a body of Protestant truth which is a fixed static norm for the Protestant community. Only when the Protestant standards prove inadequate is resource to the Scriptures to be had!

but extremely worthy of it, yet the word of man. The Word of God is above dogma as the heavens are above the earth."<sup>1</sup>

The essential difference between Schleiermacher and Professor Baillie at this point is, so far as we can see, that Professor Baillie describes the consciousness of the religious community not in terms of a feeling of dependence but in ethical terms as the moral consciousness. Here we may see the influence of Ritschl's theology of value-judgments. "The ethical judgment of Christ, in the light of his vocation, leads inevitably to the religious judgment that He is the revelation of God': this is the characteristic title of a chapter in Ritschl's. The claim of Jesus to be the Revealer of God is guaranteed by His moral fidelity to His vocation in relation to the divine purpose for the world. Therefore, He may be 'judged as revelation' - whereas in the Christian conception of revelation the very possibility of judgment is excluded."<sup>2</sup> In Ritschl dogmas are value-judgments or explications of the moral consciousness of the religious community.

The purpose of this cursory survey of representative Theologians of Modern Protestantism has been to account for the fact that dogmas, either as veritates

1. Dogmatics, p. 306.

2. Emil Brunner, The Mediator, Engl. Transl. p. 59.  
Note: Though the present writer is familiar with all the writings of Brunner published in English, this is the only quotation made from them. Due to the fact that English theologians have been prone to "put Barth and Brunner in the same bag", we have carefully avoided quoting from Brunner, even where the two men might be in substantial agreement. As a matter of fact, Brunner's Oxford Group tendencies and his admission of the "Anksaupfungspunkt" in man, places himself outside of strictly evangelical Theology. Nevertheless, his quotation from Ritschl and his criticism of it is pertinent here.

a Deo formaliter revelatae or as the agreement between the Church's proclamation and the Word of God, is not taken seriously. Our conclusion then is this: when the Bible as the concrete, objective authority of the Church is superseded by a religious 'Christian' consciousness, moral or otherwise, or when the Bible is absorbed into and included in that general consciousness, dogma is deprived of its seriousness and authority. - Let us now return to our examination of Barth's teaching of dogma.

Dogma, we declared, is the agreement between Church proclamation and the Word of God; and dogmas, in distinction to dogma, are doctrinal propositions acknowledged and confessed by the Church in her symbols. "The inner meaning of all possible propositions of the kind, the thing all dogmas mean to express when they strive towards the truth of revelation, is the dogma after which dogmatics inquires. In calling it the inner meaning of all propositions of the kind, we as good as say that it is not itself a proposition, that it is not proclaimed at any time by any Church. It is what is intended in all possible propositions of the kind, it is the dogma for the sake of which the Church proclaims dogmas. Dogma signifies the essence, of which dogmas, as well as dogmatic propositions, i.e. the propositions of dogmatic science, claim to be manifestations, the essence from which real dogmas and real dogmatic propositions may arise, namely, when they reproduce it. For the sake of dogma, dogmatics must also

associate itself with dogmas. Dogmas call upon it to give attention to dogma. They give it directions - just as the Church can give directions - to inquire after dogma. Upon a third and lowest grade it then builds its propositions, scientifically dogmatic propositions. Dogmatic propositions, dogmas, and dogma have this in common; taken together they are not the truth of revelation, but dogma is, and the dogmas and dogmatic propositions aim at being (they are so under the proviso that by the grace of God, by dint of watching and prayer they become so) on the way to the truth of revelation. Dogma in the original and proper sense, as the inner meaning of all dogmas and all dogmatic propositions, is a concept of relation, and arising from it so too are all dogmas and dogmatic propositions. Only that in their case it is set up under the conscious proviso in question as to whether they are complete relating concepts, i.e. concepts of a relation that really exists. Of the relation in point we are already aware: it is a matter of the relation with the agreement between Church proclamation and the Bible as the Word of God. Dogma may thus be defined as Church proclamation, so far as it really agrees with the Bible as the Word of God. If we knew about dogma, if we had dogma, then we would know and have the Word of God



itself in a definite and definitely indicated form and manifestations of Church proclamation, because dogma is Church proclamation in real agreement with the Word of God. But a Theology which would assert its knowledge and possession of dogma would be theologia gloriae, which ought not to claim to be the dogmatics of the Church..... The task set it (the Church) is the inquiry after the Word of God in Church proclamation and so the inquiry after dogma, after that attitude towards the Bible as the Word of God which is essential to Christian preaching. Each answer, each realisation of such an attitude and agreement could only be one of two things, either the event of the Word of God itself, which dogmatics can neither presuppose nor postulate nor create, or one of the great illusions and prolapses in a dogmatics which is not aware that for all its presupposing, postulating or attempts at creation it is nothing in respect of this event. Thus the real results of dogmatics, even when they take the form of the most positive declarations, can themselves only be new questions, questions as between what the Church seems to want to proclaim and what the Bible seems to want to have proclaimed, questions which can only be put with the greatest modesty and with a consciousness of being under the greatest stress, especially if perhaps they

are serious, important questions. If inquiry ceased, if instead of dogmas and dogmatic propositions dogma itself took the boards, if one could exhibit the agreement of definite Church proclamation with the Word of God and therefore show the Word of God itself in this particular Church proclamation, then along with the ecclesia militans dogmatics would be at an end and the Kingdom of God would have dawned."<sup>1</sup>

From the above definition and explanation of dogma and dogmas we must protest against the Roman Catholic view that dogma after which dogmatics inquires is the veritas ab Ecclesia definita. The veritas ab Ecclesia definita is itself an inquiry after dogma. It may and should guide dogmatics. It cannot claim to be the dogma which is the goal of dogmatics.<sup>2</sup> And secondly, we conclude, again in opposition to Rome, that dogma **after** which dogmatics inquires is not the truth of revelation, but it is on the way to the truth of revelation.<sup>3</sup>

But a further objection must be made to the Roman concept of dogma as being on the one hand, the truth of revelation, and on the other, the veritas ab Ecclesia

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1. Dogmatics, p. 307 f.

2. Ibid. p. 307.

3. Ibid. p. 307.

definita. For "assuming that Church dogma is to be equated with veritas revelata, is veritas revelata the truth of a doctrinal proposition? Is the truth of revelation - so we must ask by further cross-examination - like other truths in that it may be fixed as i.e. as the unveiled state of a hidden characteristic in human thoughts, concepts, and judgments and in the form thus limited and minted, held in preserve, so to speak, quite apart from the event of it becoming revealed as truth? Such obviously is the case with the truth of a doctrinal proposition. But will the truth of revelation submit to such materialisation and depersonalisation? Can it be possessed in abstraction from the person of Him Who reveals it, and from the revealing act of this person, in which it is given to another person to perceive? Can the possession of this truth take place otherwise than, once more, in an act of the person perceiving it, in a decision, i.e. in the taking up of an attitude? If the truth of revelation is the truth of a doctrinal proposition, then obviously, yes."<sup>1</sup>

"If we follow up the Roman Catholic contention that dogma is veritas revelata, then we might well ask whether "veritas revelata or Church dogma can be a truth

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1. Dogmatics, p. 309 f.

separable from the Person of God who speaks and acts by speaking, a truth which does not as such compel to decision, to action, and in the acceptance of which there is neither decision as such, nor service as such to a task lying outside itself? Whether, by having to do with such a neutral truth that allows himself to be neutral, man has to do with God? Whether a doctrinal proposition as such can be regarded as the Word of God? Must not dogma, also, and especially on Catholic ground where it is identified with the Word of God, be regarded, in conjunction with Biblical usage as it was at least still possible in the first century Fathers, primarily as a command? And so as a truth which we may possess as a truth only by it being told us by God, and by the acceptance of it being otherwise than by the decision of a definite attitude to what is said to us?"<sup>1</sup>

"According to the Catholic conception, dogma must primarily have the character of a doctrinal proposition, precisely in order that intrinsically it may be an object of contemplation, in order that anything problematic may be removed from the truth of it, as well by man's attitude to it as by God Himself. The character of dogma as a doctrinal proposition is meant to guarantee - to guarantee in a way that its character

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1. Dogmatics, p. 311.

as a command could not, in a way that would literally be endangered by its character as a command - its objectivity, its truth in itself and therewith its credibility as veritas revelata..... By the assumption that revealed truth is given over to the Church in the form of dogmas (not only in this form, but also in this form), that she possesses and has to guard them as such, has to see theologically to their validation as such, to the credibility of their truth per se, particularly by the idea of revealed truth as contemplative material put into the Church's hands, Catholic Theology stands or falls."<sup>1</sup> "The material, impersonal truth-in-itself ascribed to dogma, its objectivity for contemplation (which is the whole point for Catholic Theology when it stresses in the concept of dogma the meaning of a doctrinal proposition), is what for us is the mark of a truth conditioned and confined not only by man's creatureliness but also by his sin, in contrast with which the truth of God in His revelation is quite a different truth."<sup>2</sup>

We have shown the difference between the Evangelical and the Roman Catholic conceptions of dogma. We

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1. Dogmatics, p. 312.

2. Ibid. p. 313.

are now in a position to see clearly the great difference between an Evangelical Confession of Faith or Creed and the Roman Church's conception of a creed. According to the latter, the Apostles' Creed and the Tridentine Articles are collections or bodies of veritates revelatae. According to the Protestant view, they are interpretations of revealed truth, of Scripture. They are efforts to attain to dogma, i.e., to an agreement between Church proclamation and the Word of God.

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## CHAPTER II.

CHURCH AS SUBJECT OF THE CONFESSION.Section 1: The Solidarity of the Church.

A Confession of Faith is an act of the Church.

"Church is there where together men have so heard Jesus Christ that they know that together they belong to Him and are therefore responsible to Him as a whole. Only a Church can confess, not a society of men who have not so heard Jesus Christ. Therefore, for example, a nation as such cannot confess. In that case it would have to be a nation and a Church at the same time, like the people of Israel. Where the Word is near to men, 'in your mouth and in your heart' (Romans 10:8), then and then only ~~there~~ does it come to be confessed because it has come to be believed."<sup>1</sup> An individual who has not heard Jesus Christ in common with other men, cannot confess. Nor can an individual hear some other "special" message of grace except that which is heard and confessed by the Church. There is no such thing as a "private Christian", just as there is no such thing as private faith.<sup>2</sup> The natural variety and

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1. Theologische Existenz heute, No. 29, Das Bekenntnis der Reformation u. unser Bekennen, p. 5.

2. The Reformation was not the introduction of such ideas as "freedom of conscience", personal liberty

difference in individuals, which is often claimed to obviate the necessity of a Church Confession of Faith, cannot alter the fact that the man in the Church is primarily one called into an assembly, and only in this connection is he also an 'individual'. With the presupposition of a definition of a Confession of Faith, in which the Church is not declared to be the subject of the confessing, one will not be able to speak meaningfully of what falls under the idea of a Confession of Faith in the New Testament, nor to do justice to the Reformation Confessions, nor even to deal adequately with the question of our own confessing. The historical understanding of former Confessions decidedly depends upon our understanding that, whether well or indifferently, it was a

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and free thought, as over against the authority of the Roman Church. Barth warns us that we cannot quarrel with Rome for her exercise of authority in matters of doctrine. See Barth's criticism of Karl Heim's book, "Das Wesen des evangelischen Christentums" (translated into English under the title Spirit and Truth), in this connection. Barth's criticism will be found in a chapter entitled, Der romische Katholizismus als Frage an die protestantische Kirche, in die Theologie und die Kirche. The common idea of freedom of conscience in matters of faith has given rise to a heretical belief in the justification of denominationalism, "Free" churches, sects, and finally to-day, the private Christian - both with their own Confession of Faith or code of beliefs. With this relativizing of dogmatic truth there has followed a total want of respect for creeds and confessions. Concomitant with the downfall of authority of the Confessions there is the



Church which then confessed.<sup>1</sup> The question about confessional matters is decisively the question whether we are a Church - whether with genuine earnestness we wish to be a Church. We either have heard, and therefore belong to, and know ourselves to be responsible to Jesus Christ, in common with others, or not at all.<sup>2</sup> "Our first step in the question concerning the Confession of Faith must absolutely be the question concerning the Church, the question: Who are 'we' then who confess or do not confess? who are we who confess in this or in that way? Only in proportion as we are the Church, and know that we are the Church, and want what is given with this knowledge, will we be able to speak fruitfully with one another about the Confession of the Reformation and of

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destruction of the authority of the word of the Church. It is reasonable to conclude that the Church will not again be able to speak with authority until she has acknowledged the authority of her Symbols over her - as relative standards to be sure, but nevertheless as standards. Thus we see how the question of authority is bound up with the fact that the message of the Word of God to the individual is precisely the same as that to the Church. In the hearing of the Word men know their solidarity, their community in sin and in forgiveness.

1. Ibid. p. 5 f.

2. Ibid. p. 6.

our own confessing."<sup>1</sup>

We discover two phrases which betray the confusion which obtained in the discussion of the confessional question during the 19th century and until the present. The one is the talk about the 'confessional stand of a Church'. As if a Church which is confessing should stand somewhere and not go somewhere! The other is the 'unimpeachableness' of the Confession of Faith, as though it were a precious jewel, a valuable document, or at all events a costly if impractical instrument, which the Church has in her possession.<sup>2</sup> "The Church 'has' a Confession? No, the Church confesses because the Confession has her. One thinks of Matthew 10, of the confessional situations as related in the Acts of the Apostles, in order to make clear this distinction. And one understands the Confession of the Reformation very badly if one imagines that those Churches 'had' something in and with their Confessions of Faith. One understands them only when one sees that in their Confessions they had been faced with certain historical tasks, and did something. Similarly one will more adequately describe the Not-Confessing of a Church, so far as there is such

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1. Ibid. p. 6.

2. Ibid. p. 6 f.

a thing, not as a lack or as a poverty but as a not-doing, as an inactivity. Perhaps her inactivity is due to sickness; perhaps she is asleep. Possibly she is lazy, or momentarily unemployed. In any case, where there is no confessing there is inactivity. A Church which really and literally is not confessing, a Church to which even the possibility of confessing had been lost - if there should be such a thing - would be ipso facto a dead Church. Confession means: the Church in the act of decision; and a Church in the act of decision, a Church which at least is still capable of such an act, a Church which is still alive, or is once again alive. Of such a Church we can say just this: she is a confessional Church!"<sup>1</sup>

## Section 2: The Concreteness of the Church.

Since the question about the Confession of Faith is the question whether we are a Church, we are led to a closer examination of the nature of the Church. We can by no means give a complete doctrine of the Church here.

"Ecclesia is an assembly which has come into existence through a call. The Germanic equivalent Kirche, Kerk, Church, is to my mind not, as we are usually told,

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1. Ibid. p. 7.

a truncated rendering of the Greek adjective, *κυριακή* (*ἐκκλησία*), but is to be referred to that stem to which, for example, the Latin vocables circa, circum, circare, circulus, etc., also belong. It describes therefore a place that is definite and bounded and to that extent made prominent. The New Testament itself really justifies our connecting these two explanations together. The Church is an assembly that has come into existence in a definite place. And on the other hand, it is the place where an assembly has been held, and is to be held again and again. The supplement clause sanctorum communionem (in the proposition of the Apostles' Creed) can furnish us with a third formal mark: Church is a community, that is, it is an assembly or a place where all who belong to it have a common interest by which they are bound together into a unity." (Credo, Engl. transl. p. 137.)

Now it is precisely this idea of the Church as a community, an assembly in a definite place, which we wish to enlarge upon in connection with our development of the doctrine of the Confession. We deliberately wish to emphasize the words 'community', 'assembly' and 'place'; in a word, to stress the concreteness of the Church.

"The subject of a Reformed Confession of Faith is

a Christian community restricted to a definite place."<sup>1</sup>

The particular local or national Church confesses: the Church of Berne or Basel, of Bremen or Bentheim, of France or Scotland. Each first of all looks to his own way under a direct appeal to the Bible. Each greets the other as from one island to the other - from Basel to Strassburg, from Geneva to Zürich - rejoicing in that possibility of mutual understanding. But each Church lives its own life, and those closely related to each other through the accident of political boundaries, go their own way with astonishing self-sufficiency, even in the matter of forming a Confession. Hence comes that lack of uniformity of the formulae which occasioned Luther to deliver the judgment that the teaching of the South Germans in the motley, careless collection of Reformed Confessions, is certainly therefore already of Satan;<sup>2</sup> about which, for example, the Catholic polemical writer, Bossuet, has wondered exceedingly. One calls the Reformers 'Confessionistae' and they let it please them, as if a mysterious real power held them fast in this state. Calvin also - the circumstance occasions the thought - Calvin also, as far as I know,

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1. "Eine örtlich umschriebene christliche Gemeinschaft."

2. Enders, Luther's Briefwechsel, 5, 294.

took no significant step in the direction of a general, Reformed Confession of Faith, in spite of his international Christian orientation, his judicial instincts, his innumerable personal relations with all lands, his strongly developed interest in wise, practical co-operation between individual Churches.<sup>1</sup> Two solutions of the problem were considered in the 16th and 17th centuries. Of both it may be said that Reformed Churchism has made strikingly little zealous use of them. What did the 'generality' of a Christian Confession of Faith in the sense of the question before us mean at that time?

"Once it meant the ecumenical character (Ökumenizität) of the Roman Imperial Church, of the one constituent of the medieval Corpus Christianum. In the shadow of this ecumenical state Lutheranism had found refuge in the Confession which it had made at Augsburg before Emperor and Empire, and thereby it shattered in theory, and what is still more important, by public law

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1. Note: The question in view here is the possibility of a general Reformed Confession of Faith. The answer to this question depends upon the nature of the Church. Does the nature of the Church lend itself to a general Confession, or to a particular one, restricted to a definite locality?

the ban on particularity. Not its sinner worth has made the Augustana so dear to Lutheranism, but its quasi-ecumenical character, its quality as publicum scriptum. The circumstances existed in Germany where, until the turn of modern times, the idea of Corpus Christianum possessed disproportionately much more (also practical) significance than in Switzerland, in the Netherlands, in the French and Anglo-Scottish West. Hence the remarkable, almost magnetic power of attraction which the Augustana exercised upon the Reformers, in spite of their doubtless other theological orientation, in spite of the unpleasant affectations to which they saw themselves obliged in order to disguise these facts, in spite of the conceivably small return of love which they found at the hands of the genuine and legitimate confessors of the Augustana. As the representative of Strassburg to Regensburg in 1540, Calvin also signed the Augustana Variata.<sup>1</sup> And now the significance of that: as he no longer feels himself in the unusual situation of a German Reformed Church politician, it shows that he had not thought by his signing to acknowledge the Augustana as the general Reformed Confession of Faith, as the Germans did repeatedly in their political distress. Rather does Calvin expressly warn the French Church of the step of joining with the

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1. Op. 9, 19; 16, 430.

Germans, not only because he fears thereby the transplanting of the German actions concerning their interpretation in the West, but because he judges it as maigrement bastie, molle et obscure in its content.<sup>1</sup>

Calvin - one should read his testy letters written from Regensburg to Farel - one should consider the plans directed against the continuance of the Roman Empire which he secretly laid not less than ten years before Zwingli. Reformed Churchism as such has in theory no relation to the Corpus Christianum of the Middle Ages. And thus where no practical, political considerations demanded, as in Germany, it had no interest in an ecumenical Confession of Faith in this Mediaeval sense. With the idea of the emperor and empire, Pope and imperial Church generally, it has become an empty abstraction, if not something worse. Another objectivity and universality of its form than this would have had to correspond to the objectivity and universality of its content.

"The other possibility of breaking through the formal particularity of the individual Reformed Confession was manifestly fundamentally the same one which would come in question to-day; a collection of

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1. Op. 18, 733.



evangelical confessions respectively (there the Lutherans dissociated themselves), of non-Lutheran evangelical Confessions under the sign of one of the existing Confessions, or of the common establishment of a new Confession of Faith. Curiously enough, there is also strikingly little to report in this respect. As is well known, Reformed solidarity had not wanted in practical activity, nor in a large-minded theoretical co-operation of all leading men, and especially not until into the 18th century, in the liveliness and thoroughness of theological work. But out of this classical time of the Reformed Church at least, nothing is known to me of any significant attempt to advance to a world Reformed Confession of Faith (even with a view to a world Reformed Church capable of competing in opposition to Rome). One is careless in this respect. One appears to know of a unity which makes the congruence on paper (so seriously one takes the paper by the way) superfluous. One finds oneself from time to time in a brotherly, friendly contact with simultaneous, mutual emancipation where one would rather not be set free. Calvin, with characteristic emphasis, has called such an agreement a pia conspiratio.<sup>1</sup> In confessional

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1. Op. 5, 321.

matters there exist, so far as I see, the following five possibilities:- (1) Unification of single Churches under a common, newly drawn up Confession of Faith, as, for example, that of the Swiss Churches in 1536 and again under the two Helvetian Confessions in 1566, and therefore the formation of extended particular Confessions. (2) Declaration of<sup>a</sup> special mutual acknowledgment of the Confession of ~~the~~ one Church by the others, without the surrender of one's own, and without the drawing up of a common third Confession, as, for example, was exchanged between the Dutch and French National Synod in 1583. (3) A non-obligatory acknowledgment of a confessional symbol of one Church by many others on the ground of its inner value and its special serviceability, as above all befell<sup>the</sup> Heidelberg Catechism. (4) Mutual written or personal deliberation in difficult cases, as happened in Geneva in the case of Bolsec and Servet, and when the Netherlands at the Synod Dort asked for and received foreign Churches. (5) Private production of scientific collections, with which the Augustana would then also have to be included for the sake of the Germans, as the Harmonia Confessionum by Salnar in 1581 and the Corpus et Syntagma Confessionum by Kaspar Laurentius in 1612. Simultaneously with the appearance of the Confessio Belgica, Salnar received the approbation

of the French; with the re-establishment of the Reformed University at Warburg Laurentius is declared to be the doctrinal standard of the Theological faculty. That is all that I know, and I do not imagine that there is anything in principle to know, which goes beyond the idea of the pia conspiratio realised in this way - anything comparable with what seems to come in question as a general Reformed Confession of Faith.

"If one asks the reason for this phenomenon, one can say that it is at least the Reformed Church idea which here places a serious restriction in the way of a further-going unification. According to the definition of Reformed dogmatics, Church as visible Church is caetus eorum, qui per verbum externum, sacramentorum, disciplinae ecclesiasticae usum in unum externum corpus ac societatem coalescunt.<sup>1</sup> The sign which is decisive for our question is denoted in this definition with the concepts caetus, externum corpus, societas, coalescunt. Believe, love and hope the Church can manifestly very well do, and without further ceremony as coetus oecumenicus et universalis per totem orbem dispersus,<sup>2</sup> that is to say, as visible Church, but without her members being conscious of the community of their action

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1. Leyd. Synopsis, bei Heppe, a. a. O. P. 481.

2. Heppe, a. a. O. P. 492.

in concreto. To a concrete action of the Church, on the other hand - and as such we would have to understand the Confession of Faith - these concepts would <sup>not</sup> only have to be preferable for her members concerned, but to a certain degree, would also have to become concrete and be realised. The coalescere of the members with one another must at least in a credible way be conceived as being in motion. The coetus must really stand before the eyes as externum corpus, that is to say, as community of men which one sees or knows or with whom one can come to an understanding, those concerned as some observable congregation (Landsgemeinde). A Confession of Faith in which this credibility and observability of the confessing corpus externum should be wholly lacking, would break with the Reformed conception of a Confession of Faith and also with the Reformed conception of the Church - there would then be concrete actions of the Church which would be something else than the concrete actions of the externum corpus united by Word, Sacrament and discipline, a Church therefore which perhaps would be essentially only an institution, only an office. Therefore the Reformed conception of the Church opposes the drawing up of such a Confession. It is not the case that a general Confession of Faith must necessarily be contrary to the Reformed conception of the Church.

Theoretically it may think of an expansion of the concrete observability of the Christian coalition which could finally extend itself over land and sea. But in reality, and that is the point with a Reformed Confession of Faith, this expansion becomes the more improbable the more it is thought to be comprehensible. Are we then, we who are ostensibly those united in Christ, are we therefore one coetus, one societas, one congregation (Lands-gemeinde) one in Christ, one with another? I can believe with those farthest away, with the coetus occumenicus; I can confess my faith (N.B. without unreformed ideology) only with those nearest; that is to say, with them as my fellow-believers, and that means above all with those who are somehow conscious of being fellow-sinners and fellow-prisoners, with the more narrowly or widely conceived coetus particularis. The coetus particularis would itself have to become coetus occumenicus, in order sincerely to agree in an ecumenical Reformed Confession of Faith. Our being united to an externum corpus, accomplished under the power of the Lord of the Church, for example with the Reformed Frenchmen, would have to be for them as for us also humanly knowable and recognisable; we would have found ourselves, certainly not in sentimental brotherly love but in the misery and grace common to them and to us,

as even pardoned wretches used to find - not in order to love one another as Reformed brothers in the faith (that also goes with it to a certain extent), but rather, and this is greater, in order to fashion a genuine Confession of Faith together. Every way to a general Confession which evades the concrete reality of the community would not be a Reformed way. Here I think the reserve of the old Reformers in regard to a comprehensive confessional action must be understood: their confession occurred on the ground of the concrete reality. It was act, event, action, not only as knowledge of God in His revelation, but also and even with it at the same time, as demonstration of a genuine, human and earthly community. It therefore occurred precisely under the sober renunciation of the lustre of the old as well as of the new ecumenical character, behind which it no longer saw, or did not yet see, a reality standing. Hence, I think that the definition: 'A Christian community restricted to a definite place' belongs within the definition of the conception 'reformed Confession' as a further link in this unbreakable chain. 'Place' is to be understood cum grano salis. Not the fact that it was surrounded by a city wall or national boundaries made the particular, old Reformed Church the legitimate subject of the Reformed Confession of Faith. On

the contrary, it was that her members, humanly congregated and standing together in one place, constituted just that concrete community from which could result something so eminently in common as a Confession of Faith. Geographically this place can be extended to your liking, but it may not cease to be a place where human beings can stand, meet, weep and rejoice with one another. There, in this definite place, certainly in sin and in judgment, in the mire and misery of this definite, earthly place, there the Christian community lives, there it confesses. So far as it exists generally and over all, we want to rejoice because of it, but as Confessional Community it must exist in a definite, concrete way."<sup>1</sup>

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1. die Theologie und die Kirche, p. 87-93.

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CHAPTER III.THE CONFESSION OF FAITH AND CHURCH UNION.Section 1: The Unity of the Church.

We saw in the last Chapter that only a Church could be the subject of a Confession of Faith. We took pains to describe the Church and to justify its nature, according to the witness we have to it in Scripture as a confessing subject. But now if we turn our gaze to history we are faced with a distressing fact, namely, the fact of many Churches and many Confessions, all of them claiming to be true to Scripture and most of them claiming to be evangelical. And if we were to listen to the voice of history instead of to the Word of God in Scripture, we might be persuaded that Creeds are the chief cause of disunion in Christendom, and the principal barrier to its re-union. It must at least be admitted that Confessions of Faith have been a formidable stumbling-block in the way of our unionizing efforts. Yet in spite of what seems to be damning evidence afforded us by history and reason regarding the cause of our disunion, we must hearken to what God has said about the unity of His Church in Scripture. For even if the Lord tells us in His word the very opposite of the testimony of history and reason, if He



tells us that the Church has her origin, her existence and her unity in her Confession, then we must believe it and proclaim it. The difficulty, perhaps, is that we are not quite clear what the unity of the Church means. Let us learn then what we are to understand by the unity of the Church.

A commission has been given to the Church in the fact that "God's one eternal Word, which is valid for all men, has been spoken once for all in such a way that it became man: The man Christ Jesus, in Whom the sins of all men, their opposition toward God and with it also their opposition within themselves and with one another has been killed, borne away, forgiven and therefore no longer exists. To proclaim the reality of this event and by it to challenge to the obedience of faith - that is the commission from which the Church has her existence. She therefore does not live her own life. She lives as the Body, of which the crucified and resurrected Christ is the Head; that is to say, she lives in and with His commission. The same is also true of each individual who is a member of this Body."<sup>1</sup>

"A plurality of Churches is not provided in this commission. The New Testament certainly knows of a

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1. Theologische Existenz heute, No. 27, Die Kirche, u. die Kirchen, p. 6.

plurality of congregations, a plurality of gifts and a plurality of persons in the one Church. But these pluralities have no independent meaning. They have their origin, their right and their boundary in the unity, no, in the One: in Jesus Christ as the one Son of God, as the Dispenser of the one Holy Spirit. They are not established in - this also is to be said, not in view of God's good creation - a particular right or claim of local, national, cultural, individual peculiarities. The unity is grounded in the grace of God; and so the pluralities cannot be grounded in a second principle apart from grace. Indeed, they are themselves nothing else than the living unity of grace, the one body of Christ in the reality of His members and His organs. The New Testament, therefore, does not know of a polarity, a connecting bridge, a mutual relation between a unity and these pluralities. Between these two it knows of no mutual relation, but on the contrary, a one-sided relation of dependence, of membership, of the subjection of the pluralities to the unity. And therefore the pluralities are unable to found the Church. They would require a permanency of their own which they do not possess, which they could only create as a derivative of the unity itself. From the first Epistle to the Corinthians we know of the definiteness

with which Paul contradicts the sponsors of such a development.<sup>1</sup> And there it is only a matter of different parties, far be it of different Churches.

Wherever, therefore, one thinks to have and to be the Church, one will not possibly be able to abstain from asking for the one Church beyond the Churches existing side by side.

Barth's agreement with Calvin in his teaching here concerning the one Church with a plurality of congregations is clear from the passage in the fourth book of the Institutes, Chapter I, Sec. 9. "The Church universal is the multitude collected out of all nations, who, though dispersed and far distant from each other, agree in one truth of divine doctrine, and are bound together by the tie of a common religion. In this way it comprehends single Churches, which exist in different towns and villages, according to the wants of human society, so that each of them justly obtains the name and authority of the Church."

"But what does it mean to ask about the one Church? It certainly cannot be a matter of the charm of the idea of numerical unity and uniqueness, and also not of the moral-sociological ideal of uniformity, unanimity and harmony, but rather of the compelling content of the knowledge that the Lord, faith, baptism, one God, a single One are over all, for all, in all (Eph. 4, 5). Unity in itself accomplishes nothing.

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1. For an interpretation of this vital passage in I Corinthians, see Barth's The Resurrection of the Dead, translated by H. J. Stenning, pp. 16-21.

And all ideas and ideals which wish to unite themselves to us with this conception also accomplish nothing. Unity in itself, even Church unity is fallen and unreconciled human nature just as are the independent pluralities. The question concerning the unity of the Church may not be a question concerning the unity of the Church in itself. As such it is idle and senseless. On the way to a Church unity in itself we will have the powers of sin as well as the powers of grace against us, and in an unsurmountable way at that.

"The question concerning the unity of the Church must be identical with the question concerning Jesus Christ as the concrete Head and Lord of the Church. The benefit of unity is not to be separated from the Benefactor, in whom it originally and really is, by Whose Word and Spirit it becomes manifest to us, in faith in Whom it can also alone be a reality among us. Again: Jesus Christ as the <sup>one</sup> Mediator between God and man is directly the Church unity, that unity in which there is truly a plurality of congregations, of gifts, of persons in the Church, but by which a plurality of Churches is excluded. When we wish to recognise and express the fact that it lies in the commission of the Church to be one Church, we may not have in mind the idea - not even a yet so beautiful and moral an idea of

unity; we must mean Him. For in Him and only in Him do those Church pluralities obtain and possess their life, their place, their dignity, their right, their promise. They obtain and want to possess all that in dependence, in belonging to Him, and in subordination: just as for the salvation of human nature adopted, united to Him and so reconciled, this independent existence can only attain reality and significance. And in Him and only in Him do those Church pluralities die, which in arbitrariness wanted to erect an old or a new claim. The longing for the una sancta is genuine and legitimate precisely in so far as it is a concern for the fact that we have forgotten and lost Christ and with Christ the unity of the Church."<sup>1</sup>

"If we hear the voice of the good Shepherd, then it can not be otherwise than that the question concerning the unity of the Church becomes a burning question for us."<sup>2</sup>

That the question of the unity of the Church was none other than that of a proper hearing of Jesus Christ in Scripture is demonstrated time and again in the writings of Calvin. In his well-known pamphlet on The Necessity of Reforming the Church which, incidentally, is offered in the name of all those who wish Christ to reign, he writes: "Wherefore the Apostle declares that the ministry was instituted 'for

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1. Ibid. p. 6 f.

2. Ibid. p. 8.

the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God: that we be no more children tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, but speaking the truth in love, may grow up with Him in all things, which is the Head, even Christ" (Eph. iv, 12-15). Could he more plainly comprise the whole Unity of the Church in a holy agreement in true doctrine, than when he calls us back to Christ and to faith, which is included in the knowledge of Him, and to obedience to the truth? Nor is any lengthened demonstration of this needed by those who believe the Church to be that sheep-fold of which Christ alone is the Shepherd, and where His voice only is heard, and distinguished from the voice of strangers." Since Calvin is the theological inspirer of most of our Reformed Confessions, we perceive the agreement of Barth's teaching with them. Concerning the unity of the Church Calvin, in his Catechism for the Church at Geneva, answers the question 'What is meant by the epithet Catholic or Universal?' with these words, 'By it we are taught, that as all believers have one Head, so they must all be united into one body, that the Church diffused over the whole world may be one - not more'. And in this connection the answer to the forty-fifth question of the Westminster Larger Catechism is pertinent.

Ques. How doth Christ execute the office of a King?

Ans. Christ executeth the office of a King, in calling out of the world a people to Himself; and giving them officers, laws, and censures, by which He visibly governs them; in bestowing saving grace upon His elect, rewarding their obedience and correcting them for their sins, preserving and supporting them under all their temptations and sufferings, restraining and overcoming all their enemies and powerfully ordering all things for His own glory and their good, and also in taking vengeance on the rest who know not God, and obey not the Gospel."

## Section 2. The Plurality of the Church.

"One should not want to explain the plurality of Churches as a necessary sign of the visible and

empirical in contradiction to the invisible, idea and essential Church. One should not do it because the whole distinction is foreign to the New Testament, because the Church of the New Testament even in this respect is only one: invisible as to the grace of the Word of God and the Holy Spirit by which it and its members are founded, borne, ruled and preserved, but visible in signs in the host of those who confess themselves to it, visible as congregation and in its congregational office, visible as the ministry of Word and Sacrament. Always we can believe that the Church is there where such things are and occur. But we can only believe that the Church is where their existence and occurrence is actually at hand. There is no flight from the visible to the invisible Church. Therefore we cannot thereby silence the question concerning the unity of the Church by referring to the unity of the invisible or essential Church. If there is a question here at all - and there is a question at hand - then it concerns the empirical quite as much as the essential Church. Only if we wanted to indulge in Platonic speculation instead of listening to Christ, could we deny that."<sup>1</sup>

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1. Ibid. p. 9.

The present writer, who lived through the union controversy prior to the formation of the United Church in Canada, 1925, recalls how his own Church, the Presbyterian, in defending its position against "organic union" fled to a phrase called "the unity of the Spirit". The prayer of Jesus "that all may be one" was often declared to be an ideal true only in the Spirit. It is to be observed, however, that the United Church leaders urged Church Union not upon the basis of a right hearing of Jesus Christ in the Scriptures but upon the basis of humanistic idealism. It is to be noted, then, that neither upon the side of the Unionists nor of their opponents was there any profound theological insight. A Christological interpretation of the nature of the Church was wholly lacking both to the new movement and to the continuing Presbyterians. We conclude, therefore, that the real question concerning Church Union, in Canada at least, that is to say, the question concerning the nature of the Church, has still to be raised.

"Moreover we should not wish to explain the plurality of Churches as willed by God and therefore as the normal unfolding of the riches of grace sent to mankind in Jesus Christ. For how do we know that? Where do we place ourselves when we, in the well-known way of the Roman Greek, Lutheran, Reformed Anglican and some other Churches adjudge their special powers and functions to be within a supposed organism embracing all? And, moreover, no matter how fine it may sound, one studies historical and social philosophy but no theology; that is to say, in order to free oneself from the question concerning the unity of the Church, one produces one's own ideas, instead of holding one's ground where Christ has placed the question and of listening to Christ's own answer. If we did that, we would then know that



one can no longer possibly understand as different branches of the one and the same true Church and synthetically compare and appreciate Maria Einsiedeln and old Wittenberg or Geneva, the Roman mass and the evangelical sacrament of the Lord's Supper, the Greek images and the evangelical pulpit, the polytheism of the 'German Christians' and of those who actually belong to them and the evangelical understanding of the first commandment. Here and in such and in so many other places where the plurality of the Churches becomes visible, if we are listening to Christ, there can only take place a decision and a choice. When we are listening to Christ, we cannot believe this and at the same time hold something else to be Christ; we do not exist above the differences which separate the Churches but in them. In that 'above' there have always existed, as a matter of fact, only those who, as spectators of themselves and of God, in the last analysis preferred to listen to themselves.

"One should not wish to explain the plurality of the Churches at all. One should go about with it as one goes about with the sins foreign and peculiar to oneself. One should acknowledge it as a fact. One should understand it as an impossibility which has intruded. One should understand it as guilt which we

must take upon ourselves without being able to free ourselves from it. One should in no way calm oneself concerning its reality. One should pray for forgiveness for it, and for its removal. One should stand ready to do what in opposition to it is God's will according to God's commandment. Would not already very much - perhaps the decisive thing which man can do - have been done for the unity of the Church, if we universally on principle could and wanted so to go about with the plurality of the Churches: no longer speculatively, with no more historical philosophising, but - we say it in the simplest words - soberly, and just therefore terrified to death, but nevertheless believing and therefore hoping, and therefore also ready to obey?

"Or should there be another possibility whereby one might go about with the plurality of Churches in any other way than that with which one goes about with the sins foreign and peculiar to oneself? If, as we saw, Christ is really the unity of the Church, then manifestly there can be normally only that plurality in the Church, the plurality of congregations here and there, the plurality of gifts of the Holy Spirit, the plurality of believers from all kinds of races, languages and nations; there can be, therefore, no plurality of churches. It is then quite impossible that the

plurality of Churches which rends the unity should join in with those pluralities which are grounded in the unity. It is then impossible for whole large groups of congregations to be opposed to each other in this way that their doctrine and their Confession of Faith mutually contradict each other; that here what is termed revelation is there called error, here heresy what is there honoured as dogma; that the forms of the one must be denoted by the other as strange, unacceptable, even objectionable, that members of one should get along well with those of the other in all other possible things, but are just unable to pray together, to proclaim and to hear the Word of God and to celebrate the Lord's Supper. It is then impossible that one on this side must say to another on the opposite side, either softly or emphatically, in open hardness or in a guarded friendliness: You have another spirit than we! That is, however, just the reality of the plurality of Churches. And this reality is not to be blown away, least of all with moral exhortations to be loving, tolerant and compatible. Does one want to think of every possible avenue with such consolation and then to effect something! One mediates between the Churches in this way only then when they are no longer alive. If they are living, if we are listening to Christ, then we

not only think, no we believe that we must more or less emphatically say no, in opposition to the doctrine, form and life of the other Churches in certain decisive points, and must therefore draw boundaries and must thereby confirm the plurality of Churches. We said already: God's truth in Jesus Christ makes decision and choice ever again necessary. And so, when the proper things are being dealt with, the spirits separate, certainly never wantonly, never without painfulness, but also without affectation, without timidity in the face of the reproach of narrowness and lovelessness, without giving ear to the cry 'Peace, peace' where there is no peace. The spirits have to separate then. Then the Churches must divide or persist in a division already accomplished. And that is precisely the need before which we stand here, that there is such a "must", a "must" proceeding from Christ which even now makes real that which we, once again from Christ, are only able to understand as impossibility.

"We might well recall at this juncture that the Church is the form of the existence of the Kingdom of Christ in the time between his Ascension and His Second Coming, in the time therefore, in which He is not more present to those who are His than He was to His disciples and apostles in the forty days after Easter; nor is He

yet present as He will be in the revealed and completed glory of His kingdom. But just the unpreparedness, the burden and the need of this time becomes manifest in the plurality of the Churches, as it also becomes manifest in the innate and daily sins of the believers, of the members of the body of Christ. Just because in hope - but only in hope, we already do see beyond, we are not able to take this unpreparedness any the less seriously or to see it any less in connection with sin and to act accordingly.

"And we might also do well to recall now, that in opposition to the terrifying plurality of the Churches signs of their unity are not entirely lacking. There are - we will have to remain open to acknowledge it and to be ready to be thankful for them - there are agreements among all Churches, agreements which can often become remarkably luminous just between those Churches which are farthest apart and are most earnestly disputing with each other. Even if at the same time the ugly divisions appear lying behind them, we will never be permitted to lose sight of them or simply to scorn them. Only these agreements in themselves can obviously not become more than signs; they do not remove the need, the necessarily different faith, hope and love, nor are they able to reveal the unity of the Church.

"Finally we might do well to recall something which, even in the severest struggles of the Churches with one another, has almost never been understood nor disputed: there are the elect of God, true Christians, and in so far, a visible, if also scattered, form of the unity of the Church in all Churches. But what shall we say of the others? What of the Churches as such? Shall we, according to the judgment of the "spiritualizers" of all times, regard them as lost? And if we do not regard them as lost, what then do we say to the fact that the true Christians have manifestly no significance for the state of separation of the Churches as such?

"It will be well when we remain standing before this need as before a riddle, for whose explanation we have, in fact, no theory at our disposal. If we could derive the plurality of Churches from a unity as from a principle within it; if we could, so to speak, unfold the truth of the ecclesia sancta catholica, of the communio sanctorum according to the scheme of thesis, antithesis and synthesis, in order then to perceive that there had to be and has to be the existence of Rome and Constantinople, Wittenberg and Geneva, Episcopalianism and Presbyterianism, Reformation and Modern Protestantism, and all the other oppositions side by side and

yet opposed to each other - then there would be here no real need. But here is great need - need, to which we, in practice, have to take up a position and to which in practice we are only able to take up a position; and the first and last word of this position which we have to assume will have to be the prayer for forgiveness and sanctification, directed to the Lord of the Church. The plurality of the Churches obviously means our denial of Him. We can not listen to Him without making a decision, without choosing, without confessing. But we are unable to do even that without separating ourselves and thereby coming again to Him in the contradiction. Who are we, what is this Church, which are so opposed to Him? It will be best if we give no other answer than that the Church is the assembly of those who know that they deny, but deny face to face with Him Who is also their Saviour and Who as their Lord, is greater than they."<sup>1</sup>

Section 3: The Task of Uniting the Churches. '

"If Jesus Christ is the unity of the Church and if the plurality of Churches is our own need, then there is no evading the fact that the uniting of the Churches

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1. Ibid. p. 9 f.

into one Church is a task, and indeed a task set by the Lord of the Church, a commandment. With that we have not said that we are able and will fulfil this commandment. Much more, we have not thereby stated that all, or this or that of what has been, and still is being attempted in the direction of a uniting of the Churches, is also to be valued only partly and approximately as fulfilment of this commandment. We will have to keep much more clearly before our eyes that the fulfilment of this commandment is wholly and exclusively the work of the Master, Jesus Christ Himself; that the Church is already united in Him once and for all and in spite of all the plurality of Churches, and not first that it must be united by our willing, ability and effort. Nevertheless, just in faith in Jesus Christ the task of this uniting has doubtless been set us and there is - not in virtue of our Christian work but in faith in Jesus Christ even a participation in its fulfilment. We can not give assent to our justification, which rests on the ground of the righteousness accomplished in Christ alone, without hearing His commandment, without there being said with this assent: we have been claimed by Him and therefore for the unity of the Church; that our activity, strange as it may be in itself, to those who are His, is defined as a Church-uniting activity



where we no longer belong to ourselves but to Him.

"But what does the uniting of the Churches mean? What does union mean? Was the conscious task thereby already recognised and set about in that the different Churches, at least since the 18th century, have made the idea of mutual bourgeois tolerance peculiar to themselves? We certainly cannot, nor do we wish to deny the fact of the advantages and benefits of the development since then. We are, however, also unable to suppress the grave considerations which range themselves against this development. The origin of the idea of tolerance lies in politico-philosophic perceptions which are not only foreign to the Gospel but are opposed to it. Its triumph within the various Churches was a document of the inward weakness of these Churches, and not of inward strength. Among its effects one at least is not to be overlooked, namely, that the Churches have increasingly forfeited their character and with it their significance in the life of the nations. And in the degree in which the Churches now and then pulled themselves together again for self-criticism and to Confession, it was demonstrated that the old divisions had not been touched by all the tolerance, much less removed."1

It is almost superfluous to remark that this "gospel of tolerance" which goes hand in hand with the modern doctrine of "brotherly love" as being the essence of Christianity finds, in any case, no precedent in the Reformers and in the Reformed Confessions. The whole polemical tenor of the 16th century is incompatible with the spirit of modern Protestantism. The Reformation Confessions, with their emphatic damnamus against the enemies of the Gospel, stand in marked contrast to the happy Short Statement of the Church's Faith issued by the Church of Scotland. The modern Church is conscious of no enemies and feels herself under no compunction to fight anyone. She instructs her young in the 'historic' tenets of the faith but she is aware of no necessity of warning them against assaults upon the faith. The truth is the modern Church, splendidly typified by the present Church's Confession, is tolerant! With this despicable spirit of tolerance in matters of faith it is no exaggeration to say that the character of the Scottish people has changed and has been corrupted. What has the modern Scotland in common with the authors of the Second Scottish Confession of Faith of 1580, the National Covenant? Let us listen to its intolerant words that Barth's meaning might become quite clear to us. "..... And therefore we abhorre and detest all contrare Religion and Doctrine, but chiefly all kynde of Papistice in generall and particular headis, even as they are now damned and confuted by the word of God and kirk of Scotland. But in special, we detest and refuse the usurped authoritie of that Romane Antichrist upon the scriptures of God, upon the Kirk, the civill Magistrate, and consciences of men: all his tyrannous lawes made upon indifferent thingis againis our Christian libertie: his erroneus doctrine againis the sufficiencie of the written word, the perfection of the law, the office of Christ, and his 'blessed Evangell': His oorruped doctrine concerning originall sinne, our natural inhabilitie and rebellion to Godis Law, our justification by faith onlie, our unperfect sanctification and obedience to the law; the nature, number and use of the holy sacraments: His fyve bastard sacraments, with all his ritis, ceremonies, and false doctrine, added to the ministration of the trew sacraments, without the Word of God: His cruell judgement againis infants departing without the sacrament: His absolute necessitie of baptisme: His blasphemous opinion of transubstantiation, or reall presence of Christis body in the elements, and receiving of the same by the wicked, or bodies of men: His dispensations with solemnit aithis, perjuries, and

degrees of marriage forbidden in the word: His cruelty against the innocent divorcist: His devilish messe: His blasphemous priesthead: His prophane sacrifice for the sinners of the dead and the quicke....." etc. We have quoted this long passage that we might learn the great gulf which lies between us and the Reformation. There is, unfortunately, in many quarters a frank and happy admission of this gulf, the opinion prevailing that we have advanced beyond the Reformers, and that it is an excellent thing that we are no longer Reformed. Whereupon it is well to ask whether we have not at the same time advanced beyond the Bible and, in truth, founded another Church. We must ask ourselves whether in our confessing there sounds forth the Pauline note: "But there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than ye have received, let him be accursed" (Gal. 1:7-9). And then we must ask ourselves whether we ministers and professors do not, in fact, proclaim another Gospel than that which we find in the New Testament. Are we not terrified by Paul's anathema? At any rate, <sup>one</sup> the great concern of the inspirers of our Confession was that they should not fall into such a dreadful condemnation.

"Something similar is also to be said of the unions and alliances which exist to-day, and have existed for a long time, in all lands, be they between Churches as such, be they between those with common purposes though in other matters standing on opposite sides, or between those with special communities of work in home and foreign missions. Is that in which those of opposing sides find themselves together and even united the one thing which is essential? Obviously not, for otherwise they would instantly have to unite and to find themselves together in a quite different way. If, on

the other hand, it is the inessential, if perhaps it is only what the Church has in common with all other human societies and undertakings, if it is perhaps only a higher humanitarian need or striving that leads to such meetings and unions, what can they render for the true unification of the Church? Is it not a symptom of the fact that a mere alliance in itself has absolutely nothing to do with genuine Church union, that, even with the strong and moving way in which the Lutherans and Reformed Churchmen have been drawn closely together in these years at the Confessional Synods, they have not yet celebrated the Lord's Supper together, much more, at least on the Lutheran side, come to a new, if perhaps not also a thoroughly genuine awakening to a special Church consciousness?

"Will the corresponding also be said of the so-called ecumenical movement under whose auspices we are here confessing with each other? I think: the less, and the more circumspectly and modestly it sets itself goals, the less it will surround itself with all kinds of Hallelujahs, as has often happened all too soon in the Age of Tolerance as well as in the age of Church alliances. Mutually to know each other as those who entertain different beliefs just in respect to that which is essential to each, honestly to learn to listen

to what is essential in other Churches, and together with conscious and determined representatives of other Churches to ask after the one thing which, according to the claim upon both sides with which such different things are meant - that would always be a good thing and full of promise, even when already attempted as man to man. And why shouldn't this programme be honestly set about to a great or greater degree? But what will be the result? It can still simply consist in either some interesting but unobligatory religious and confessional affirmations of history being made, or on the other hand, in the different Churches, when they have mutually become more thoroughly acquainted with each other than hitherto, becoming first of all conscious of their own peculiarity and necessary separation. The union of the Churches is too great a matter to be the result of a movement, no matter how cleverly and cautiously directed a movement it might be. Formal resolutions and demonstrations on the part of the different organs of the ecumenical movement in any case permitted an anticipation of this result, and therefore it lacked the Church substance which it required in order to be heard and to be understood within the different Churches now actually with the authority of the voice of the one Church, and not merely as brave humanitarian

resolutions such as a commission of the League of Nations could conceive of."<sup>1</sup>

"From this standpoint I cannot regard as a misfortune the well-known and often regretted reserve of the Roman See towards former as well as present-day efforts for union. Somewhere and by someone, in opposition to the presumption of every Church movement, there had to be and has to be recalled the fact that the union of the Churches cannot be made, but on the contrary, can only be found and acknowledged in obedience to that unity of the Church already accomplished in Jesus Christ. As a sign of that I understand the (in other respects certainly presumptuous on its side!) papal refusal to have anything to do with the hitherto existing efforts for union. And as a sign of that fact certainly too much caution can not be exercised in those circles where they are properly concerned with thoughts of Church union in connection with a common celebration of the Lord's Supper and the like. All that is good is by no means now suddenly true, and therefore offered, or even so much as permitted!

"Union of the Churches in the unity of the Church - let us not deceive ourselves: that would not only mean

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1. Ibid. p. 15 f.

this, that the Churches mutually tolerate and respect each other, and also occasionally work together. Not only this, that they come to know each other and mutually learn to listen to each other. Not only this, that they feel themselves to be one in some common cause. Nor would it mean only this, that they really became united in faith, hope and love, and therefore could unanimously celebrate the Worship of God. It would mean above all - and this would be the decisive test of the genuineness of all the rest - that they jointly confess, that is to say, that together they could also openly address the world and thereby execute the command of Jesus upon which the Church is grounded. The testimony, the message which it delivers with her doctrine, her form and with her life, would have to say one and the same thing, in however great a variety of ways, in the language and form of the various places, gifts and persons. Union of the Churches in the sense of the task which is seriously placed before the Church would doubtless mean: unification of the Confessions into one unanimous Confession. If varying Confessions remain, then there remains the plurality of the Churches.<sup>1</sup>

(The italics are mine.)

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1. Ibid. p. 16 f.

We have now reached the fundamental thesis of this Chapter, namely, that a Church finds her unity in her Confession of Faith. But when that statement has been made it requires to be qualified. We quote from that outspoken opponent of union, Karl Friedrich August Kuhn: "All efforts for Church union base themselves upon the unity of the Church. The unity of the Church does not rest upon an association composed of single congregations and upon the unanimity of all theological tendencies alone, but upon the heavenly unities which the triune God effects in the Church."<sup>1</sup> "This Lutheran theologian manifestly wished to say: the unity of the Church cannot be a work of man, which is to be brought about by certain changes in the constitution, as one can bring it about between different societies. Nor does the unity of the Church depend upon certain understandings among theologians, but upon a resolution of God which God makes known in the Church because here and now it corresponds to His will. Consequently efforts for union as attempts to bring about such a unity - and that is all the more self-evident the further they wished to go - would stand or fall with the fact that a

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1. Cited by Barth in Die Möglichkeit einer Bekenntnis-Union, p. 3 f., from "Der innere Gang des deutschen Protestantismus." 1874, 2, Bd., S. 204 f.



knowledge takes place in the Church. Not the knowledge: It would be fine if we had a unity now, but to the contrary the knowledge, "God wills that such a unity should come to pass now. It is an existing heavenly unity which is now to become visible on earth. And because He wills it, we must therefore do our duty in obedience to Him that what is God's Will in heaven be not opposed on earth". If this thought is correct, then the following quite definite consequences could be drawn from it in view of the question of the possibility of a Confessional union.

"1. In no case will our ever so good, earnest, pious and loving will be decisive as to whether there is to be union in the Church. In the fundamental document of the Prussian Union, namely, the appeal of Friedrich Wilhelm III on September 29, 1817, we read: 'No longer is there anything to hinder this arrangement as soon as both parties seriously and honestly want it in a true Christian sense.' I regard this sentence of King Friedrich Wilhelm III as a critical one. Upon the basis of this sentence the will of man is to be the decisive factor in bringing about the union. I would not be able to acknowledge that as the foundation of a genuine union. It could be that both parties wanted this unity in an earnest, honest and Christian sense in

the whole of Germany, but that the Will of God was otherwise, and that therefore the genuine unity of the Church, the unity which can have its origin only in God's Will and in God's Commandment, would not thereby be served. Here we are not helped by the simple invitation: Dear people, be sensible and have the goodwill for peace! Union in that sense, already in a purely outward sense, can only be possible in the truth, that is, then, when the Word of God makes one of those heavenly unities visible, perceptible and audible for us on earth.

"2. In no case may our human will contend against it, if it should perhaps now be the Will of God that union has to be. All reasons which we could possibly have against the union would then have to recede. When we had sincerely to say to ourselves: we have to do it as God's command. All our thoughts have to be thrown into the fire again when the Will of God opposes us in a new way, in order to come forth from the glowing fire as new thoughts, obedient thoughts. Union can be necessary, necessary in the deepest sense and all along the line as well, when the Word of God reveals to us a heavenly unity which the triune God affects on earth in His Church, and makes visible.

"Hans Ehrenberg, of Bochum, who some months ago

wrote a splendid little article in regard to the question of union, says in it: 'Satan tempts the Church as much with the alluring picture of our unity and oneness as with the alluring picture of our variety and riches'.<sup>1</sup> If it is rightly perceived and said that there always exists the twofold Satanic temptation: the striving after unity without the truth and the striving after the truth without love, then we must let it be said to our theme to-day that under no circumstances may the question concerning the possibility of a confessional union be the question concerning the most alluring picture of Church formation, concerning an ideal, be it Lutheran, Reformed or United; on the contrary, our question concerning the possibility of a Confessional Union must be the question of our right obedience in the matter. Therefore it may not run: Do we want to bring about a union in doctrine which seems correct and desirable to us? Have we enough love and patience to do it? On the contrary, the question must run: Are we permitted to come to such a union and therefore: must we not come to such a union? And again, the question cannot run: Do we want to persist in a separation which seems good and proper

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1. Cited by Barth from "Von der Kirche der Union zum Bekenntnisbau der DEK", 1934, S. 5.

to us? Have we enough strength of character to assert ourselves as Lutherans or Reformed Churchmen under every circumstance? On the contrary, the question must run: may we, that means must we oppose each serious union now as before? I believe that much would be gained in the whole struggle for union if we assembled ourselves in the Spirit and in the truth about this question."<sup>1</sup>

When we speak of a confessional union, we have in mind, of course, the union of Churches of different confessions. Specifically that means in Germany the union of the Lutheran, Reformed and United Churches; in Scotland the union of the Church of Scotland with the Free Churches and the Episcopal Church; in Canada the Church of England, the United Church and the Presbyterian Church. Consequently as we listen to Barth as he addresses himself directly to the situation in Germany, we will take to ourselves what is also applicable to our own ecclesiastical history. The writer, for instance, as a minister of the Presbyterian Church in Canada, has in mind the union of Presbyterian, Methodist and Congregational Churches which was consummated in June, 1935. Accordingly, whenever any one entertains the thought of participation in a confessional union of Churches in any one of these or of other countries, one will bear in mind the grave warning that such a step must not be a weakening of the confessions, an expression of indifference to faith and knowledge within the Churches concerned.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Die Möglichkeit einer Bekenntnis-Union, p. 3 f.

2. See Die Kirche u. die Kirchen, p. 17.

Section 4: Church Union and the Confessions in 19th Century.

In this regard we must inquire whether or not the unions consummated in the 19th and early 20th centuries and the efforts towards union now in effect did not and do not signify a weakening of the Confessions. Let us then with Barth take a glance at the past in order the better to understand the present.

When, therefore, one studies the history of the Church union in Germany in the 19th Century one discovers, for example, that political and economic motives played an important role. Politically it was an outcome of the attempt on the part of the Hohenzollern house to create one great united Protestant front in Germany.<sup>1</sup> Economically, an important migration of people from the Lutheran east to the Reformed west and vice versa took place in Germany. "These people were no longer members of living congregations but were already members of congregations which had been weakened by Pietism and <sup>the</sup> Enlightenment in their confession, and which were in the position to absorb any elements of the Lutheran Confession into the Reformed and vice versa, so that more and more a mixture of both originated. One will not be able to say of this reason for union

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1. See Die Möglichkeit einer Bekenntnis-Union, p. 7

that it arose from faith, but on the contrary that it manifestly came from a weakness of faith."<sup>1</sup> No worldly wishes such as for a national or even an international union should be allowed to weaken the Confessions. And no economic reasons, such as the desire to save money for the Church and to avoid the "senseless" plurality of Churches in small villages may determine a genuine union.

Much more important than the recognition that political and economic motives have played a large part in the Church union in the past, is the knowledge of that spiritual atmosphere in which they occurred. Speaking for Germany, Barth writes: "It cannot, in any case, be denoted as a situation in which the Church was very wide awake, in which it knew exactly about her foundation, her task, her nature, her faith and her Confession. On the contrary, where union was suggested then the situation was such that that period had lost the understanding for the Confession altogether, the Reformed as well as the Lutheran, so that it had become indifferent to the Confession. The declaration of union was then no great matter because one no longer had won that which stood in the way of this union, because one had little or nothing more to surrender -

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1. Ibid. p. 8.

just like a family, which, having fought over a quarrel for a decade, can one day drop it because the younger generation no longer knows the meaning of the quarrel and is tired of it. But one cannot even call this a Church or a Christian attitude towards a Confession. That was the time in which the Church was understood as a communion of men united by a definite pious feeling, as Friedrich Schleiermacher expressed it, or as others said it then even more plainly: a community of those who together are on the way of a certain morality, who are united in the belief that duties to God and one's neighbour are to be understood and fulfilled in such and such a way. It was then no longer perceived why this community should be further split into Reformed and Lutheran when truly nothing more remained between them to divide them, and they could, in fact, be one in this doctrine. The question concerning the truth which was such a burning one for the Reformers, was understood in that period as the question of individual, personal decision. Then there arose the doctrine which one hears even in our day: of the various types, the various impressions of the one and the same evangelical truth, in which all are somehow agreed. One can and must indeed ask oneself whether this way of viewing the matter was along the line of obedience towards ~~and~~ the Will and the

Word of God, or whether very human thoughts were not decisive."<sup>1</sup>

In view of the preponderant influence which German theology, philosophy, science and historical criticism has had upon our Anglo-Saxon religious thinking, it can scarcely be denied that unions and union movements among us - national, ecumenical and international - have been fostered in a spiritual atmosphere fundamentally the same as that described above for Germany. It is true that there are important surface differences, but in the main we have had no advantage over the land of Schleiermacher, Ritschl, Harnack Hermann and Troeltsch.

"In spite of all that," continues Barth, "I do not wish to dispute the fact that powers of faith were effective in the union of the 19th century. In the decrees of Friedrich Wilhelm III and Friedrich Wilhelm IV, one encounters an earnest and pious import, and earnest and pious men interceded for the union all along the line, who on the basis of Scripture made valid for the union what could only be made valid. St. John's Gospel resounded ever again. Nevertheless, when I read these witnesses, I cannot hide from myself the fact that this voice of faith does not become for me in a truly authentic fashion the voice of faith in the 19th century. I do not get away from the question whether the evangelical faith really properly understood itself at that time, whether something was not acknowledged within the Church then as has so often been the case, which had



its motive first of all completely outside the Church, or much rather, in a heresy of the Church, and which one understood all too well how to adorn afterwards with Scriptural phrases. Was the Church not obedient to the voice of a stranger in that which she desired from the union of the 19th century, and not to the voice of the Good Shepherd? I ask, I recall the reservation, and in no way could I be sure with certainty of the friends of union that in this union one could perceive an outflow of faith! Was it indeed, not one of these heavenly unities of the triune God, but on the contrary, in a decisive sense, a human unity which one aspired to and set up there?

"When I further reflect upon the effects of the union, I am strengthened in my doubts. They have meant a destruction of the Confession, of Lutheran and of Reformed. By destruction I understand: the production of an uncertainty as to whether what the Fathers have confessed is valid, whether it was true and whether it has validity for us to-day as well. By destruction I understand the spirit of beclouding and confusion in which the purity of the Confessions was impaired on both sides, without one knowing what occurred, solely from outward causes. One could certainly ask oneself whether such surrendering of certain Lutheran or Reformed

propositions could not also become necessary, when it is the Will of God. But at that time it had the worst result in that even the Confession itself, the Christian Confession as such was destroyed or at least very seriously impaired. What did it mean when at the beginning of the 19th century the King and his theologians explained that from now on the Confessions stand side by side with equal value, and that from now on the evangelical Church rests upon these two pillars? Does it not mean: where all are right, then in the last analysis no one is right, and in the end there no longer exists what the Reformers of the 16th century meant - the one Confessional Church which in faith recognises her Confession as genuine and therefore alone true and legitimate? Must it not mean that? An enemy of all Christianity, Bruno Bauer, wrote a book in the year 1840,<sup>1</sup> in which he boldly and insolently explained: the union is an enormous transformation which has overthrown the visible Church as such, which has elevated the enlightenment to a law within the Church, and which has completed the revolution in the Church, namely, the revolution against the authority of God. The Church has thereby annulled the Confession and ceased to be a

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1. Cited by Barth, Bruno Bauer, Die evang. Landeskirche Preussens und die Wissenschaft, 1840.

Church. That is radically and recklessly said, but it is not easy to contradict it. Somewhat more mildly but actually no less sharply F. Chr. Baur<sup>1</sup> has expressed himself in declaring that the union made visible the fact that one no longer had, nor could have a settled standard of doctrine, that is to say, no doctrine with an absolute claim, and with the task of confessional oppositions, the idea that the Church has to proclaim a divine, absolute truth has had its day. That was the voice of enemies of the confessional faith, of a confessional Church. Must not this voice give us cause to reflect? Has the union not really served indifference and with it prepared the dissolution of Christian knowledge into arbitrarily formed ideas?

"And further, if one looks back upon the union of the 19th century, one cannot deny that the union has never been what it set out to be: a union of both Confessions in such a way that the individual Confession should remain preserved in it. The more seriously the Confessions were taken, and the more the Confession of the Fathers lived on, the more it was shown that the union was a nebulous formation which in practice could scarcely assume form at all. As a matter of fact, it

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1. Cited by Barth, F. Chr. Baur, Geschichte der christlichen Kirche. 5 Bd., 1862, S. 446.

did not arrive at a Confessional Union. That was demonstrated at the General Synod of 1847. At that time Professor Nitzsch wanted to formulate a new Confession which avoided all danger points. Did they, then, no longer exist? Did one thereby wish to say that they are not to be taken seriously? In this way it could not succeed. Where a confessional consciousness still existed, where one still stood in the faith of the Fathers, opposition had to be raised against this union. "Old Lutherans" and Reformed Churchmen withdrew from the Church in order to form "pure" Churches.

Obviously, in the 19th century nothing else was possible.

If one wanted union, it went at the expense of the Confession; if one wanted the Confession, it went at the expense of the union. (The italics are mine.)

"One can also urge that there was much that was positive. One used to allege that in the 19th century there had been a theology which was an evangelical theology. One further refers to the fact that in the 19th century humanitarianism (Liebestätigkeit) blossomed forth so richly. Finally, one refers to the union of the Church into a Church Alliance which was accomplished outside of Prussia, to the day on which everyone sang together so happily, heart and heart linked together!<sup>1</sup>

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1. Cited by Barth, G. Holstein, a. a. O. S. 243.

Certainly all that is nothing at all. But I must say that by all these facts I am not convinced in the question which I have to raise in view of the past. For the highly-praised theology of the 19th century has been, precisely in its most important representatives, a theology which on the whole brought about the dissolution of the Confession. And where it did not exactly wish to do that, it did not in any case, as was true of Nitzsch, touch the old oppositions between the Confessions. One could do it. But by hiding one's eyes to dangerous things, they are not thereby improved. And where the theology was truly a Confessional theology, it had to underscore and sharpen these oppositions again, and accordingly it did not behave in the spirit of the union. It was the same with the humanitarianism which blossomed forth. The Christian societies in the 19th century remained neutral towards the Confession. What did they do when they exalted this neutrality into a doctrine? Did they not thereby advance the theology of the 18th century - the theology of the Enlightenment and of Pietism - and did they not thus countenance indifference just when they wished to put forth a positive theology? It is not entirely accidental that just the representatives of Christian humanitarianism and the Christian societies have, on

the whole, not assumed a very praiseworthy position in the Church struggle of 1933.....

"The will for union was strong in the 19th century; but at the same time there is the unmistakable fact; everywhere a lukewarmness for the Confession prevailed in the union, and at the same time there prevailed everywhere an inability to come to a union on the basis of the Confession. These two antithesis - on the one side that indifference to the Confession which adhered to the actual union and, as usual, on the other side the unbridgeable exclusiveness of the true Confession towards the union - have smouldered throughout the whole century. The question still exists to-day. And whoever addresses a word to the problem of union may well ask himself whether the difficulty in the relation between union and Confession can be overcome."<sup>1</sup>

"According to my view, one is therefore unable to assert that in the union of the 19th century something of a heavenly unity on earth became visible in the Church. On the contrary, I am persuaded it must be said: when the Church should again come to a consciousness of herself, it will not be able to go further along this way, but then - I speak as I would have spoken in

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1. Die Möglichkeit der Bekenntnis-Union, p. 9 f.

1932 - the way out can only be when one calls out to the Lutherans and to the Reformed Churchmen: you must become certain of your own things again! Then something like a Church union can be produced between you both. It is right when you consolidate your positions on both sides and you challenge all those congregations which no longer know accurately what they are - and they are not so few - decide! and therefore: divide! in order then, each as confessing congregations to become perhaps at least capable of an alliance! Thus must one speak in view of past history."<sup>1</sup>

Let us interrupt Barth's development of his teaching concerning the Confession of Faith and Church Union to ask ourselves, first of all, whether the union movements which have taken place in Canada and in America, for instance, have first begun by the uniting parties becoming certain of their own credal positions? One will, we believe, be compelled to answer in the negative. As a rule an effort has been made to ignore the theological differences and to find a unifying principle over and above them. The belief has widely prevailed that to accentuate the differences in doctrine was to widen the breach between the Churches. Now let us learn from Barth how communions with conflicting dogmatic positions can merge into a genuine Confessional union. To anticipate him a bit, we will see that the Confession, and therefore the union, arose in the face of a common peril, a common heresy. That peril in Germany was the heresy of the German Christians. But as we now follow Barth further we would urge all to put this question to themselves: Are our Churches not confronted by a peril and by a heresy which fundamentally and truly is the same as that of the German Christians? Does there not exist for us as well the possibility of a true Confessional Union in a recognition and confession of this error in our midst and in

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1. Ibid. p. 13.

the acknowledgement of Jesus Christ as the one Lord of the Church? This, in any case, is the only purpose in pursuing a study of contemporary ecclesiastical history in Germany.

Section 5: The Possibility of a Confessional Union.

"1. In the year 1933 a heresy appeared in the German Evangelical Church which, of course, was by no means fundamentally new, but in which, on the contrary, all that had long since lived in the Church as heresy appeared to form itself into a ball, and now, formed into a ball and carried by the whole weight of a changed political situation, assumed definite form: I refer to the heresy of the German Christians. It signifies a radical attack upon the first commandment: I am the Lord Thy God, Thou shalt have no other gods beside me. When the German Christians asserted that we have not only the revelation in the Holy Scriptures, but also a revelation in history; that salvation is to be found not only in Christ but also in the creaturely being of man, namely in the German man, they sinned against the first commandment and have introduced the heresy of a second God, a second source of salvation into the Church. And now this heresy has the peculiarity that it appears as a doctrine of union in which the difference in the Confessions now for the first time become of no



consequence.....

"2. The second fact is no less remarkable. On the one hand it consists in the fact that what we previously learned about the development of the Confessional question in the 19th century, received its confirmation. It demonstrated how weakened the Confession actually was in that for a hundred years people had learned their Heidelberg and their Lutheran Catechisms without having understood what they had learned. When the Heidelberg Catechism begins with the declaration that Jesus Christ is my only comfort in life and in death! or when it says in the Lutheran Catechism that Jesus Christ is my Lord! it was finally no longer comprehended. The bitter fruit of a century long development. And it demonstrated that just those parts of Germany, or of the German Church, which, comparatively speaking, had preserved the Lutheran or Reformed Confession pure, did not prove itself particularly wide awake, but that just in outspoken Lutheran or Reformed districts the opposition to the invading heresy was at least not very strong. On the other hand, the remarkable fact that precisely the union became the scene of an awakened opposition, is not to be denied. It was Reformed Churchmen and Lutherans in the union and not in the pure Lutheran and pure Reformed districts who

first of all recognised the whole danger of the moment and summoned to opposition, that means, however, to Confession.

"3. The third fact was this: this opposition of the years 1933 and 1934, without one having sought or willed it, suddenly led in a remarkable way to something like a union in a very strict sense of the word, namely to a common Confession. It proved that Lutheran, Reformed and United Churchmen had the same thing to say in the face of the heresy of the German Christians which had broken out. They have said that, and with it the whole problem of union has entered upon a new phase. In the declaration of the Confessional Synod at Barmen in 1934 we read: "As members of Lutheran, Reformed and United Churches we may and we must speak together in this matter to-day. Precisely because we wish to be and to remain faithful to our different Confessions, we are not permitted to keep silent when we believe that in a time of common need and temptation a common word has been placed in our mouths. We commend to God what this may mean for the relation of Confessional Churches with one another." Observe well: it does not say, We want to speak together! It says, We may and we must speak together! Furthermore, it is not said here: in spite of our Confessions, but: because we wish to be

and to remain faithful to our Confessions..... The old Confessions are no longer a thing of which one has to be a bit ashamed, but now one stands by it: We are Lutheran and we are Reformed. And just as such we now have something in common to say. We are standing before a common question. There were certainly common needs and temptations in the 19th century. But it is strange that the Lutherans and Reformed Churchmen did not feel themselves compelled to confess together, perhaps in opposition to a phenomenon like the "Life of Jesus" by Friedrich Strauss!! However, as a matter of fact, it was and is the case now, that a common need and temptation came upon the Church which was received as a common need and temptation, and in opposition to which one confesses in common with others. The house burns, and each one races out of his room in order to take part in extinguishing the flame as well as he can. In this time of common need a common word has also been put in our mouths; not for centuries has it been so. Now suddenly we are able to speak together. The six propositions of the Barmen declaration are truly no exhaustive Confession - what Confession of olden times was that by the way? - yet when it is taken seriously as such a common declaration, it is a Confession nevertheless. "We commend to God what this may mean for

the relation of the Confessional Churches with each other." That wants to say: We ourselves stand astonished before the fact, gratefully accept it, and neither know nor ask whither it will further lead. We commend it to God. Therefore: we are not now going to build a German Evangelical Church beyond the old Confessions. We rest contented with what was called a "union of confessionally defined Churches" in the declaration of the Confessional Synod of Dahlem. We only say together what we may and must say now. We wish to wait and see whether we shall be led into an hour in which we may and must say still more. Someone has said: the Lutherans and Reformed Churchmen have been threshed together by the need of the time. Indeed, we must wait until we are "threshed together" in a quite different way! In so far as we have also really said, and moreover will say, what already we may and must say in common to-day, in so far as we do not have to be refuted by the Holy Scriptures or by the old Confessions in doing so, there would be, if only partially, a Confessional union to-day. In view of all the signs of the "union" at Barmen I would venture to say: There is a genuine union! And it could be a fact that here one of the heavenly unities became visible which the triune God effects. Just because it is such a modest

thing, a few preliminary propositions, I would therefore say: It looks as though we might dare to hope that it has been uttered here in obedience.

"And now as to the question of our theme: Are we standing to-day before the possibility of a Confessional Union? I mean, if we hold the past and the present beside each other, will the decision consist in whether we are united in a twofold way, first, in that the hitherto existing way of union cannot proceed further, that the old ways are barred to us, and that we have to make a halt here; and secondly, in that things have happened in recent years which we have just indicated: the fact of the invasion of heresy, the fact of the opposition to it, and the fact of the Barmen "union". I believe if we were united in that, we could then say Yes with one another to the possibility of a genuine and true union. Then above all there would be this further to say: this Confessional Union would be a matter in which quite decisively and essentially we would have to cast our eyes forwards - forward to the one Church which in obedience to the voice of her Lord confesses her faith and is thereby obedient to the Lord and the Holy Scriptures through which He speaks to us. And it would place itself in the line of Confessions of the Lutheran and Reformed Fathers. Each further step along this

way would have to be at all events a step which we do not take arbitrarily but which we had to recognise and to conceive as a step really demanded of us. Each further unity between Reformed Churchmen and Lutherans would have to be a found and not a sought unity. Under no circumstances might it originate in arbitrary anticipation. But if true obedience were awakened among us, naturally no denial of what is necessary for us could take place as well. This confessional union would perhaps have to be and to remain, now as before, only a partial confessional union; perhaps we might still have to be satisfied to find ourselves together in the fight against error and in a confession of faith in certain things and again to separate in other matters, and to take care that we no longer lose sight of the view which has been opened to us in these times and which may not be forgotten by one who has shared in it. In this sense, as a continuation of the way which has been pointed out to us in these years we would be permitted to say Yes from the bottom of our hearts to the possibility of a Confessional Union. Thereupon, to be sure, the question is immediately put to us: Are we not the people to say Yes in this sense? We are not coming to a Confessional union if as usual the same old enthusiasm for peace and the same old need for rest are

the motives behind our will for union. On the contrary, we are reaching a union when we are challenged by the situation to-day to speak out that Yes as Reformed, Lutheran or as Consensus-Congregations. Whoever is engaged in the struggle to-day, whoever knows himself challenged by the need in which the first commandment no longer is held in honour, that man, to all intents and purposes, stands with the Lutherans and Reformed Churchmen and vice versa; there the union is achieved.

"Thereupon at this point the old question will again have to be raised. Granted that we had found a bit of union as a confessional community, then the question will emerge once more: What then becomes of those things which divided us in the past and still divide us? What becomes of the difference in the old Confessions? Above all it should be considered here that we have not reached this new confessing arbitrarily, but as those who wished to be and to remain faithful to the old Confessions. The old Confession is the way out to the new Confession and this way must remain in force. And now everything will depend upon our really taking seriously the Confession, the old Confession as such as a point of departure from which we can advance to the attack. The old Confessions are simultaneously the trenches in which one found protection prior to

leaving them in order to advance to the attack."

During the course of a conversation with Barth at Christmas 1936, he informed me that he entertained a preference for John Knox's Confession of Faith to the Westminster. The spirit of the two was different. The former was a fighting, reckless affirmation of the sole sufficiency and authority of the Lord Jesus Christ and an attack upon His enemies. It possessed the joyous, thankful spirit of new discovery. On the other hand the Westminster Confession - and the same applies to the Canons of Dort - is a product of later Protestant scholasticism. Back of it is not the same driving imperative to confess. One has the impression that it represents the sum of theological wisdom which men, from the vantage point of a century of doctrinal argument and debate, had gathered together and now possessed. One has the feeling the authors of the first Scots Confession were possessed by the truth; whereas the authors of the Westminster possessed the truth. This may be a slight over-statement, yet I think it is true that when once again the Church of Scotland advances to battle against the devil and her enemies, John Knox's Confession will be her armour both for her defence and her attack.

"As such they will always retain their importance. But it can never be a question of one understanding the Confessions as a human possession. On the contrary, everything will depend upon each one making the jump in the direction of the enemy and from his own point of departure fighting as a Confessor. Then the Confessions in their differences will not have the character of different types of one kind, but they will then speak of the different origin, a different responsibility, a different commission which lies here. The differences will then have value. That is a very strange, astonishing and sometimes even annoying fact, but a fact



which we will have to put up with. It may easily be as well, that the differences in the Confessions will retain their importance as important differences in the Schools, in the tendencies of thought. That can be something very earnest, something responsible, but just opposition of the Schools and not of the once allied Confessional Churches as such. And hence it may be in a congregation that it is a congregation conscious of its Reformed, Lutheran or even United origin and responsibility, and that the question of decision, as it asserts itself with this definiteness, is not put to them there, but as it is actually brought about by the positions which it has been commanded to take up. It would therefore be easy for me to imagine that the present time and the new situation mean that the confessional consciousness is not weakened but rather strengthened in and by the fact that the Church task becomes a common one. And I could imagine that exactly under these circumstances the question for this and that present-day Consensus Congregation could be very seriously awakened. Do we not have to decide? But the other thing can also happen that in such a congregation something is awakened to a knowledge of the Word of God in the present and that it obtains additional direction with it which it did not have in the 19th

century. Certain oppositions will remain continually and the German Evangelical Church as a whole will perhaps have to remain, in an emphatic fashion, a union of Churches instead of becoming a Church union. To be sure, it could also be that the initiated Confessional Union operates so powerfully that the fight for the truth in the Church goes so deeply into the Confessions that clarifications and even abolitions of many of the still existing differences are reached and thereby a Church union. What will come, how it will take place, that I couldn't answer without being a prophet. We will not be able to do better than to repeat what was said in the Barmen declaration in view of the whole situation: We commend it to God. If, at all events, this one thing alone remains clear: the legitimacy or illegitimacy of all efforts for union is determined by the fact of whether or not our attention is directed to one of the heavenly unities which the triune God effects in the Church."<sup>1</sup>

Section 6: The Church in the Churches.

"The task of Church union flows and falls essentially and necessarily together with the concrete, practical task which is the presupposition of all Church

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1. Ibid. p. 13 f.

activity: to hear Christ. That means, however, that question of the Church must be put and answered decisively in the Churches, in the many Churches now separated. For how should we otherwise hear Christ except according to special instruction and responsibility of the Churches, that is concretely, of the particular Church to which we belong, in which we were baptized and led to faith, to which we are obligated? Whether it may please us or not, whether thereby we share in disobedience and sin or not, whether our longing for the una sancta is large or small: we are all divided. Our Church existence, as long as we have such a one at all, is a divided one. That is to say, we can only hear Christ in our own Church and not at the same time in this or in that other Church, still less in a neutral place outside of or above the different Churches. I think that this - if one holds this distinction permissible at all - is true for the individual, personal life of faith of each individual. Certainly it applies to that hearing of Christ about which we are now asking - for the hearing of Christ as the presupposition of the activity of the Church and also, therefore, of the work for the union of the Churches. Whoever asserts that he is able to hear Christ just as well in this or in that other Church as in his own, should ask himself

whether he has not confused that obedient hearing of Christ in his own and in other Churches with one of the numerous possibilities of an historical and aesthetic interest. And as for that neutral place outside or above the Churches, committees and conferences may meet there, and irresponsible and unfettered, individual Christian ladies and gentlemen may follow their feelings, ideas and plans. Concerning those movements above or between the Churches which proceed from such gatherings, the situation is as follows: either they are good for nothing because they do not take, or do not take seriously the problem of the Church, the problem of doctrine, the problem of her order, the problem of life, or - they are some good while they do take these problems seriously, and lo, in effect, they form a Church themselves. A new Church, or a community resembling a Church, arises. And it takes place for the sake of its neutrality. Now, however, the old question concerning unity is raised in opposition to this movement which is supposed to be the embodiment of unity. Church work, and therefore Church union work as well, will be done in its place in the Churches themselves or will not be done at all. If we wish to hear Christ as the one Who Himself is the unity of the Church and in Whom its union is already accomplished, then above all we must

confess our special Church existence, although modest about its genuine objectivity. To be sure we are thereby confessing ourselves to a very painful matter, whose provisional character and whose necessary overcoming may and should stand very clearly before our eyes. We are thereby confessing our own and our fathers' hidden (and perhaps for a long time no longer altogether hidden!) sins. But thereby - and only thereby do we also confess to the call of Christ. He even now, however steeped in secret human mistakes and troubles, has thus and not otherwise come to us. So long as Christ has not otherwise called us, we confess ourselves to Him when we confess ourselves to our own Churches. But if He has really called us in another way, then it is another Church to which we have to confess ourselves than to our own. We would be serving Church union least of all if we, disdaining our own place - that is to say, the place where the Church has been for us - wanted ourselves to exhibit the unity of the Church and hence Christ, or rather to pretend it.

"The question which each individual Church would have to put to itself, if we wanted first of all to touch upon the problem of life, would be the question: Do we really hear Christ in the manner asserted and theoretically represented by us? Do we, according to

our own traditions and Confession, really hear Him in the position and attitude which <sup>we</sup> take towards the realities and problems of the world which surrounds the Church? Do we perchance allow our relation to the State - to-day we think straight away of this bit of our environment - to be really dictated by Christ in the way which suits us, in our decided and fixed way? That is to say, of course, not by a discovered Christ, but by the Christ, by the Holy Scriptures acknowledged by our Churches as well as by all others as being authoritative? Or do we follow in this connection, as in another practice, a strategy and tactic, in which we are actually listening to quite other voices which are also possibly very respectable but foreign to Christ? Of what value is it? If two or three even so different and separated Churches, each thoroughly in its own way, would persistently put this question to itself, the Church would thereby become an event and also visible in these Churches! In recent years Lutheran and Reformed Churchmen have to a degree, come remarkably close together when they saw themselves asked about the practical decision offered by Christ, that is, properly understood, on the basis of the Lutheran and Reformed Confession. Does it perhaps not require among other Churches only just a little more attention, awakened by oppression,

for the task of making the Church attitude to life consistent, in order to make something of the experience of the one Church in the plurality of the Churches themselves, without unions and attempts at union leading the way?

"Once again, in view of the problem of order, should each individual Church not have to put to itself very simply the question: Are we really hearing Christ, the Christ of the Holy Scriptures when in the spirit and direction of our Church we act in such and such a way with the congregation, its courts, its Church services? Are we in earnest when we assert that our papal or our episcopal or our system of presbyteries and synods, or, if we are Quakers, our lack of system, is the true exhibition of the Lordship of Christ in His Church? Is it exactly for the sake of His glory, as we say it is, when we think we have to put the sacrament, or the liturgy or the sermon in the central place in our worship of God? When, according to our best knowledge and conscience we maintain such and such to be according to the proper order, have we not perhaps reflected, naively and profanely, more monarchically or democratically, or individualistically that upon Christ, and have fallen into a magic, an aestheticism, a rationalism? I say: let each single Church take

itself - precisely and only itself, but Christ in itself - absolutely seriously, and then the one Church will become event and also visible in these single Churches as such, even when there is no talk of efforts for union, and even when at first nothing at all is to be changed in its constitution and worship. So long as it is zealous about its ordinances as such without self-criticism, it is certain it can exhibit only the plurality of the Churches. But it can exhibit the unity of the Church in the plurality when it has a zeal for Christ in its ordinances.

"But each individual Church should also have to put this same question to itself in view of the central problem of doctrine. It may sound dangerously relativistic when at the same time we say: the Roman Church should carry through and think out to the end its doctrine of nature and grace and its doctrine of justification developed at the Council of Trent; the Lutheran and those Churches defined by Calvin their particular doctrine of the Lord's Supper, and Modern Protestantism its doctrine of man as being basically good, each Church by itself - but not in the sense of some one natural consequence, not in the furious logic of a penultimate presupposition. On the contrary, each should carry them through and think them out to the end in a hearing of Christ, the Christ of Scripture;



then, of course, the Confessions will here and there oppose each other with astonishing sharpness. But that is what many people, desiring peace, are afraid of not only in Confessions but in any serious theology. It is remarkable but nevertheless true that those who in one Church do not understand themselves as distinct from those in another are seldom interested or moved by theology; they are the theological loafers, amateurs, eclectics and historians here and there. While precisely among those who have to oppose a sound and consistently developed and necessary Sic et Non, a secret encounter and fellowship usually takes place. It arises in every conflict over a matter about which, from different angles and in painfully different ways, they concern themselves. This matter, however, could be Jesus Christ, and hence the unity of the Church. For my part I am persuaded that this unity <sup>an</sup> was/event and also visible in greater degree at the so often lamented Marburg discussion of 1529, and also in the ill-famed polemics of the later Lutheran and Reformed orthodoxies, than in certain modern situations; in which because of a purely supposed love one no longer dared earnestly and honestly to ask after the truth, and therefore to let a consistent assertion and a consistent contradiction confront each other. Asking

after the truth of Christ is always full of hope, as it is also full of love. It always and under all circumstances serves the union of the Churches - even when at first no one relinquishes his position and the divisions are still further accentuated."

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CHAPTER IV.THE DESIRABILITY AND POSSIBILITY  
OF A CONFESSION OF FAITH.Section 1: The Desirability of a Confession.

There is by no means general agreement as to the desirability of raising the question of a Confession of Faith in our day. The whole tendency of the age has been exactly in the opposite direction. What efforts have been expended upon the articles of faith have principally consisted in attempts to re-state the Reformation documents in the light of modern scientific and religious knowledge, to abbreviate and condense the articles of faith into the most simple and comprehensive terms, and to discover a common and harmonising principle in the various Confessions of the Churches for purposes of Church union. The action of the United Church in Canada at the time of the consummation of Union in 1925, affords an example of the spirit which is almost universal. At that time the Basis of Union was drawn up, derived, as it was averred, from the Confessions of the Presbyterian, Methodist and Congregational Churches. Obviously those very serious theological disagreements which would have made a reconciliation between John Knox, John Wesley and John Robertson

an impossibility, were easily passed over and ignored in the interests of "practical Christianity", and the "spirit of Jesus". This anti-confessional anti-theological tendency perhaps took its most extreme form in Switzerland where, during the last century,<sup>1</sup> the Churches dispensed with the creeds entirely. While we have instanced only Canada and Switzerland, the same spirit is more or less typical wherever ecclesiastical unions have been fostered. Although it is admitted that no great theological differences separated the various bodies in the Church of Scotland, yet it could scarcely be claimed that the Union was actuated by new and profound theological insights.

It is indeed a remarkable fact that in those happy days of the 19th century when people were replacing the old walls, towers and ditches of our cities with parks, fountains and play-grounds for children, no step was taken towards replacing the old, now superfluous(?) Church formulae.<sup>2</sup>

The apathy of the 19th century towards the confessional question, and its inability either to understand the old documents or to re-interpret them, should be

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1. Theologische Existenz heute, No. 29, Das Bekenntnis der Reformation und unser Bekennen, p. 29.

2. Ibid. p. 21.

sufficient inducement alone, if others were wanting, to consider the presuppositions and possibilities of a Confession of Faith. As a matter of fact there are numerous weighty considerations at hand which should lead us to open up the whole problem of the Church's faith in a definite manner.

The sheer unprofitableness of a so-called "Confession-less" stand should incite us to an examination of the content of our Reformed articles.<sup>1</sup> For what value is there in the claim that the opposition between Calvinism and Arminianism is no longer to-day a genuine opposition?<sup>2</sup> What advantage is it to a minister to be able to enjoy the most radical theological Liberalism in the shade of an abolished or superseded Confession of Faith?<sup>3</sup> What does it avail him to be able to practise the utmost liberty in doctrine and forms of worship in our Churches? To "the freedom of conscience" or to "the general Christian consciousness" are ascribed a higher authority than is granted to the Church symbols. Yet one would imagine that the Church would have to have constant recourse to her Confessional standards in order to learn what exactly she stands for, and the

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1. Ibid. p. 21.

2. Ibid. p. 21.

3. Ibid. p. 21.

reason of her origin and existence. It is no accident of fate that in our day, when one scarcely knows any more about the Church's profession than the opening questions of the Shorter Catechism, the notions concerning the Church and the Gospel in distinction to ethical and social idealism, and humanism, are extraordinarily nebulous to say the least. In conflict with the virulent religions of Communism and Fascism, the Church in Germany has been forced to define her nature most carefully. A similar task is incumbent upon the Church in Scotland and England. Instead of Fascism and Communism, the Church here is faced with an ethical, social and political idealism. It seems to be a relatively simple matter to sympathise with the Confessional Church's opposition to the German Christians because our British idealism is also intolerant to both Communism and Fascism. But were we to see in what the real opposition of the Confessional Church consists, we should be as actively opposed to the prevailing theology of our British Churches, as the Confessional Church is to the "German Christians". The careful marking of the boundaries between Christian belief and heresy is substantially the same thing as raising the question of the Confession of Faith. We who still call ourselves Presbyterian should, one would naturally think, be

persuaded to take into account the Reformed symbols in order to know why we are Reformed and not something else.<sup>1</sup> A genuine abolition of our confessional stand would require that just those who do not wish to be Reformed should also surrender their opposition - that is, those to whom we have no desire to go over: the Catholics, the Lutherans, the Anglicans, the Sects, those outside the Church.<sup>2</sup> We cannot go on treating those communions as if the orthodox Reformed doctrines were their accepted teachings. If we wish to make it quite clear why we are now not this or that but, accidentally or otherwise, just "Reformed", then no other course remains open to us than to return to the documents of the 16th century.<sup>3</sup>

The very existence of the Reformed documents is, indeed, a challenge to us to come to grips with them. They are for us a standing question, perhaps even a guilty conscience. They interrogate us even when we are not disposed to be bothered about them. The Reformation Fathers have the right to demand from us serious consideration and are able to make this demand only because they are our fathers in faith and in Jesus Christ.<sup>4</sup> This is demonstrated by the formal desire

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1. Ibid. p. 22.

2. Ibid. p. 22.

3. Ibid. p. 22.

4. Ibid. p. 20.

and purpose of their Confession, namely, to witness to the sovereignty of Christ in the face of error.<sup>1</sup> The men of the Reformation are not our fathers nor do they possess any authority to address us because our Churches are their natural or legal successors.<sup>2</sup> The force of their claim upon us lies solely in their desire to have the Holy Scriptures valued as the source and standard of doctrine.<sup>3</sup> "They wished to do it in the thoughtlessness and recklessness of trust in the Holy Spirit Whose witness they had heard out of the Scriptures. I say that this was the formal intention of the Reformation Confessions. Whether, from the point of view of the content, they have done justice to this intention, can and must be asked. Nevertheless, this was evidently their design and purpose. It may be discerned in spite of the conditions of their time, their practical purposes - which they also obviously had - and in spite of the linguistic and ideological tools with which they operated at that time."<sup>4</sup>

"There is no doubt that the Reformation Confession, viewed from its formal intention, is in a remarkable contemporaneousness with the first Christians, and

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1. Ibid. p. 20.

2. Ibid. p. 19.

3. Ibid. p.19.

4. Ibid. p. 19.



exhibits, therefore, a proper confirmation and fulfillment of the New Testament conception of a Confession. The Reformation Churches wanted to treat with their confessions as a Church. They dared to make certain decisions in their Confession for which they had finally no reason other than the obedience which was imposed upon them - decisions in which they gave expression to a new acknowledgment of the Lordship of Jesus Christ, and with which they also separated themselves from certain errors which had prevailed for both short and long periods in the Church."<sup>1</sup> The Confessions of the Reformation may also be said to conform to the New Testament in their content. But according to the Confessions themselves, in this regard no positive assertion can be made except under the presupposition that its conformity to the New Testament in content is ever again to be examined. In any case, the desire of the Reformation symbols to acknowledge the sole authority of the Word of God in Scripture is unquestionably a reproach to our Churches to-day. When this reproach becomes intolerable we will take up the confessional task in earnest.

Even those Churches which have reduced the articles

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1. Ibid. p. 19.

of belief to a minimum might indeed be drawn to a consideration of the substance of the Confessions of Faith by those very formulas which were obviously conceived in order to generalise, efface and to becloud the theological issues which were at least once vital and might even become so ~~once~~ again.<sup>1</sup> As a matter of fact, one should speak very reservedly of a confession-less Church, even of the Churches in Switzerland, because as long as the old Confessions such as the Westminster and the Helvetica are still virile enough to engender opposition and scorn, they are not wholly dead in our midst.<sup>2</sup> In spite of the fact that the 39 Articles and the Westminster Confession of Faith do not seem to play a very active part at present, they do possess great potential powers. It may well be that they will become a decisive factor in the Church and political life of Britain and America, just as the Confessions of the Lutherans and Reformed Churches have become so in Germany. We may have desired to abolish the creeds; we have succeeded only in part. They have merely been temporarily pushed aside.<sup>3</sup>

Recent events in Germany, and indeed the trend of

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1. Ibid. p. 21.

2. Ibid. p. 22 f.

3. Ibid. p. 23.

theology in the last 15 years, have most certainly presented us with the question of the necessity of confessing the faith anew, or at least of affirming the old articles anew. But in spite of the precedent set before us in Germany, the confessional question has not yet become exactly a burning one for us. Perhaps we are of the persuasion that the Confessional question ought to become a burning one now. "But just because we have seen in Germany at first hand how it happens when the question of Confessions reaches the burning-point, we would like to ask and to warn all those who are of this persuasion not to want to make it a burning question. When it becomes such, it will be because the Lord of the Church wills to have it so.<sup>1</sup> Our duty is to be ready when the Confessional word comes to us. 'Watch therefore, for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come' (Mt. 24:42).

We have already observed that no Church can truly claim to be confession-less so long as the Reformation articles are able to provoke opposition. "But there is one other outward but telling fact that, doubtless in continuity with the formal principle of the Reformed Confessions, the texts of the Holy Scriptures - one

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1. Ibid. p. 29.

wholly disregards for once the contradictory theological theories and the spirit or lack of spirit of its interpreters - actually form at least the point of contact and the point of departure of the proclamation, the organising middle-point of the Church worship, and at least the central problem of theology in use in our Churches."<sup>1</sup> The historical critical method in the interpretation of the Bible, and the inflow of a veritable ocean of natural theology which has been going on for more than two hundred years have not been able to alter this fact. That cannot be explained by the power of blind custom and habit. Why should one not have been able to escape from it as one has done from so many others? Why does one not do it? In the maintenance of this ordinance we do, in fact, confess with the Confession of the Reformation.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, as long as the Bible maintains the position it now holds in our Protestant Churches, we cannot be said to be entirely Confession-less, even if we have abolished the old formulae. "Because the God Whom our Fathers confessed has preserved for us this one ordinance, He has given us a sign until this day that He has not entirely

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1. Ibid. p. 23.

2. Ibid. p. 23.

withdrawn His face from us. In this one ordinance there are hidden enough of the health-giving powers to overcome the forces of sickness in spite of all their strenuous resistance. Since this sign has been preserved for us, it would be ingratitude to say that our Churches have become "confession-less" with the "abolition" of the confessional symbols."<sup>1</sup> And if we are on the way to becoming confessing Churches in a somewhat other and in a somewhat stronger sense than we have been for a long time, then we know of no other ground and no other power which should lead us along this way than just this one proposition of the Reformation Confession.<sup>2</sup>

All that does not imply an apology for the status quo. Neither the excuse for, nor the glorification of the confusion of men follows from the praise of the providence of God. And we are bound to speak of the confusion of men when we have to speak, even in the

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1. N.B. Once again it must be remembered that in these quoted passages Barth is addressing himself to the Swiss Churches which have abolished all creeds. Nevertheless, what Barth has to say here is quite applicable to those Churches which have done away with Confessions in all but name only.

2. Ibid. p. 25.

most felicitous instances, of the confessional weakness of our Reformed Churches.<sup>1</sup>

While most Presbyterian Churches still officially acknowledge the Westminster Confession of Faith as a subordinate standard, its efficacy has been, in point of fact, tacitly annulled. There are more ways of getting rid of an old friend<sup>1</sup> who has become troublesome than that of killing him. A simple device is to ignore him. We may well ask ourselves whether our silence on the matter of Creeds is truly a silent Confession, a silent obedience. Or is it rather a silent denial, a silent blasphemy?<sup>2</sup> Is the Church advancing or in retreat in her present indifference to Rules of Faith? Has our faith become greater or smaller?<sup>3</sup> "Have we been following a maximum or a minimum tendency, the line of least or greatest resistance?"<sup>4</sup> Has our attitude towards Confessions been adopted in the freedom of the Holy Spirit, or are we practising some other banal

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1. Ibid. p. 25.

2. Ibid. p. 26.

3. Ibid. p. 26.

4. Ibid. p. 26.

freedom which in no way is to be accounted for by faith and the definitions of a Confession?<sup>1</sup> Why has the freedom in which one has either discarded or ignored the old Confessions not proved itself to be the freedom of the Holy Spirit in that one had sufficient insight, strength of determination and courage to introduce a new and better confession in terms of the modern confessor himself, in terms of the modern Protestant conception of Christianity?<sup>2</sup> Did this modern faith, the supposed new Christian insight demand only the abolition and the transition to uncertainty of our Confessional formulae instead of a new clarity and definiteness? No, it was manifestly a spiritual need into which our Churches had fallen, and in which they still find themselves.<sup>3</sup> The spiritual need has made the present situation inevitable and perhaps makes it inevitable for a long time to come. In this need stood not only

1. Ibid. p. 26.

2. Ibid. p. 26. This confessional weakness of modern Protestantism as reflected in the Church of Scotland has been observed by Professor W.W. Bryden, in Why I am a Presbyterian, p. 80 f. "Creeds are not made, they are always born, often born in blood. It is a significant fact that a Committee chosen from the best minds of the Church of Scotland, with a view to bringing in an adequate revision of the Westminster Confession of Faith, have in their successive reports to Assemblies virtually acknowledged the above claim."

3. Ibid. p. 26.

the Liberals but also, as history shows, the Conservatives of that time." "For them all, the power and the blessedness of the first commandment which is fulfilled in Jesus Christ was too small, and man in the particular form of the so-called modern man had become too big. In this state they were no longer equal to the Reformation Confession, no matter whether they loved it or struggled against it; and in this condition they were quite unable to confess themselves in a new and better way. In this need we all stand to-day. To make a virtue out of this need, to call this weakness strength, that - that we should not do even if we are perhaps unable to see how we should be able to get rid of it."<sup>1</sup>

Yet another consideration which should impel us to explore the whole question of the Church's Articles of Faith is the inability of modern Protestantism to draw the implications and consequences of the confession of Jesus as the Messiah in regard to the problems which confront our time. "We speak a great deal of Jesus Christ but our speech about Him is weak and sickly in the face of what the people say of Him directly, and, more especially, indirectly. That one can not be a

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1. Ibid. p. 27.



good Reformed minister and at the same time an Arian, or a follower of the Tridentine doctrine of justification, or a genuine fanatic; yea, that one as a Reformed minister is not permitted to be a Crypto-Lutheran - that is not the self-evident result of our persuasions. And what is the practical effect of the obligations laid down in our ordination formulae which describe our confessing as occurring on the ground or under the guidance of the Holy Scriptures? To how many of us is it clear that he is permitted to open his mouth only in the sense of these obligations which were expressly undertaken by him; that is to say, that he is permitted to speak solely as an exegete, and absolutely not as a more or less audacious free-thinker? And does that carelessness and recklessness, that true freedom on all sides, that freedom which is grounded in a final binding because it is the freedom of the Holy Spirit - does such freedom belong to our confessing? Is our confessing still comparable to the Confession of the Reformation - and in spite of everything may be so? If such is the case, let us boldly compare our confessing with the Reformation. Let one compare it in all points and ask oneself whether one must not speak very earnestly, unaccompanied by all the understanding and excusing voices, of the Confessional weakness as a need

of our Churches, and then certainly of the liberation from the question of statutory Confessions as an illustration of this need?"<sup>1</sup>

Section 2: Nature of a True and False Confession.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is not identical with Christianity. The Gospel is the mighty message which is intended in Christianity and upon which Christianity, good or bad - and rightly understood, always more bad than good - is founded and to which it is related.<sup>2</sup> The power of this message does not permit itself to be established and exhibited historically. The power of the Gospel is not self-evident, governable nor calculable. Yet it is not altogether invisible. The power of the Gospel shows itself in signs, and these signs have historical repercussions.<sup>3</sup> "It manifests itself in events which, as such, are historically established and exposed, and which definitely have the power to hold up, accelerate or cut across historical developments, or to institute new historical developments. As signs of the power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ

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1. Ibid. p. 28.

2. Theologische Existenz heute, No. 25, Das Evangelium in der Gegenwart, p. 23.

3. Ibid. p. 23.

they can of course be misinterpreted, misunderstood and overlooked."<sup>1</sup>

"One such sign, one such historical form of the Gospel is the Confession of Faith - a word which just in our days has become actual and meaningful in a remarkable way. The Confession is the public and responsible affirmation of the Gospel which the Gospel itself has brought about and compelled precisely in the midst of the historical development of Christianity.

"But this affirmation has not come out of the historical development itself, nor on the basis of a judgment of it, although it is not without certain very clear views concerning history and a judgment upon it."<sup>2</sup>

The primary condition of a Confession is not that man decides to confess Jesus because of certain reasons, but that Christ without any reasons has decided to confess Himself to us. True Confession does not go with the stream but against it - against the intellectual stream which was at that time popular, against results of the interpretation of the times by the then existing historians, against the stronger battalions, and, above all, against the tendencies which at that time were

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1. Ibid. p. 23.

2. Ibid. p. 23 f.

called Christianity. True Confession is not for the improvement, the extension, the salvation or preservation of a Christianity which is a human work, conceived and thought out by man. True Confession in its essence is much more a decision occasioned by the Gospel itself which certain men simply must make in order once again to say Yes to the Gospel clearly and loudly, and without regard for the world and Christianity and what may come of them. One recognises the true Confession by this freedom, by this carefree attitude, in contrast to the questions: What will come of it? How many and who are we that are involved in it? What will we achieve thereby? Who will hear us, who will agree and who will help us? It is the freedom of the Gospel itself which is mirrored in this freedom of the Confession. Moreover, one recognises the true Confession in the definiteness in which it says "Yea" to the Gospel at a certain time. This "Yea" has a particular tone which distinguishes it from all other "Yeas", and especially from the "yeas" which sound Christian to all ears at the time. Consequently, this "Yea" is indeed a certain form of "No" which, even if vexatious to hear, is necessary. In this positiveness and polemic of the Confession one will find the necessary correspondence to the divine positiveness and critical character of the

evangelical message itself. One further recognises the true Confession in that the confessors, whether they be heroic personalities or insignificant folk, are willing to adopt an attitude in a given situation, to be disciplined, and step for step to conceive and execute conclusions corresponding to their Confession; to make decisions, to abandon this position and to occupy another, and all with the same disregard for the world and Christianity. Finally, one recognises the true Confession in that it establishes the Church, perhaps wholly anew just there where in the midst of the Church one no longer knew what the Church is: the society of faith and obedience. Mere expressions of opinion, mere explosions of persuasions are unable to do this; the Confession of Faith can and does do it. The Confession calls (to others) as an answer to the call of the Gospel. The Gospel itself, however, calls men together to that place where they can only and truly become one.

"Why do I speak just of the Confession of Faith in view of the present-day situation of Christianity? It would be lapsing into the historical, a procedure which as such could not take us any further in the consideration of these things, if one were to ask me whether I think there is anything like a true Confession of Faith to be known anywhere in the world. I certainly think

that such can be known. But that is simply my opinion. I do not know, for example - so clearly does this matter stand before my eyes and so burningly does it lie upon my heart - I do not know whether and to what extent what one in Germany calls to-day Confessional Church, Confessional Front, a Confessional Community, has to do with a true Confession of Faith. There is much to be said against it. But without the admixture of opinion I do know that in view of the situation of Christianity to-day, a Confession of Faith is at all events the only possible answer to the Gospel. In any case, whether that happens or not, this alone will be important in the present situation: that some men in Europe and in America - whether it is a few thousand or only two or three does not affect the matter - that they, renouncing all other possibilities, advance to a Confession of Faith..... The important question is not whether the experiment with 'positive' Christianity in Germany finally succeeds or not. Ultimately only the question which is directed to us can be important: whether we do not delude ourselves when we think that the decision of the Gospel, in virtue of its inner power in the complete freedom of the Spirit, has not already fallen upon us, and therefore whether we must be present with our Confession, good or bad, even should it then be more

bad than good! In the present situation it will not be of importance whether millions will occupy this or that position towards Christianity, or whether, for example, the German Confessional Church successfully asserts itself. This alone will be important - and important for the state of Christianity as well - that a few win the bright and true position which is being offered to the Gospel."<sup>1</sup>

"The Gospel upon which Christianity is founded and to which it is related simply wishes to be the truth. Therefore, the Confession to the truth must simply result from a knowledge of it. An openness to the powerfulness of the Gospel, and consequently the courage and determination to confess, is perhaps lacking to-day as little as in olden times. The insight into this connection between Confession and knowledge has been lacking for a long time and perhaps is still far off. Perhaps in the midst of Christendom Christianity has therefore become in a very remarkable way simply a more or less dispensable secondary value because we know increasingly less about what is to be dealt with in this matter and what to say about it. What has been called a Confession of Faith in the Churches has been the

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I. Ibid. p. 24 f.

repetition of the Confession of the Fathers, and this has been observed more from pietistic and aesthetic reasons than from one's own participatory knowledge. The Gospel, however, cannot be served by such repetition. And when the Gospel is not served, there Christianity is loosed from its foundation and its purpose. And when that has once occurred, it is not so easy, even with the best of good will, to proceed once again to a Confession of Faith. Possibly in these good intentions one first discovers how very strange it has become to him. A pitiable helplessness and lack of unity can then arise among those who would gladly and heartily like to be confessors of the Gospel; or what is still even worse, a serious and new confusing of the Confession which has been summoned forth and actually based upon knowledge, with the repetition of the venerable words of the Fathers. Especially can it be a source of danger to the youth who, as it is well known, are quick to learn catch-words. And it becomes dangerous when they, in order to advance more speedily, imagine that they can be spared the whole severity and need of a fresh questioning after the Gospel, of a genuine and disciplinary concentration and reflection on its truth. And one may not delude oneself; even the Confession which is seriously and sincerely intended, will sound hollow and



will rapidly enough die away when this concentration and reflection is lacking. It will want that daring freedom. It will not awake that necessary scandal, but at best, astonishment and displeasure. It will neither be capable of decision nor action; it will not found a Church. It will, therefore, create no facts nor precipitate any new insights. These are the experiences of the German Confessional struggle, which one elsewhere will do well to consult."<sup>1</sup>

### Section 3: The Possibility of a Confession.

Behind the particular Confessions of the Reformed Fathers stood the absolute necessity of obedience to the will of God. If our Confession is to be a genuine one in the sense of the Reformers, then this same absolute necessity must lie behind ours as well.<sup>2</sup> "Concerning this one can say little in a comprehensible way. But this much can be said: God protect us and all people whom it concerns from all conceivable and practicable, manufactured results, and from all undertakings which lie in the realm of the possible in this age of airplanes and radio, as though behind them should stand the

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1. Ibid. p. 26 f.

2. Wünschbarkeit und Möglichkeit eines allgemeinen reformierten Glaubens-bekenntnisses, in die Theologie und die Kirche, p. 97.

Christian need, the Christian constraint, the earnest, despairing investigation and knowledge of their inevitability in the will of God. There are things which one may and can only do when one must do them. To these things belongs a Christian Confession of Faith. Not enthusiasm, not good will, not practical brotherly love, nor a concern for Church politics can replace this "must", this recognition of the inevitability of the Creed in despair. One says Credo first when all other possibilities have been exhausted, when one is utterly confounded and when one can say nothing more than just Credo. Every other creed is a humbug and of the devil, even if it were literally the Apostles' Creed. The Reformed Church cannot afford to utter such another creed. As far as it is concerned the Church creed stands under no other law than the one. It understands itself also as Confessional Church, as the communio electorum et vocatorum; as the communion of those who have been chosen out of the lost, those who have been called out of darkness. It is completely 'the Church of the Wilderness',<sup>1</sup>..... It must be the Confession of those who have been abandoned by God and as such visited by God, of the lost and as such of the saved."<sup>1</sup>

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1. Ibid. p. 97.

"I would like to develop this simplest presupposition in this twofold way: who believes that he must speak in obedience to the will of God and therefore in the name of God, who takes on the office of a prophet and goes into the world - and this must be the case where a Christian Confession of Faith is to occur - he must be of the opinion (I do not wish to pursue further the presuppositions which are here considered) that he has something right and important to say about the decrees of God, and at the same time, has something definite to offer in His Name. Speaking systematically, there is a dogmatic and an ethical presupposition of the Confession of Faith. But in both cases it consists in the fact that it precedes what the Church practises in concreto in her confessing, a witness which wants to be made, information, aye a twofold information of knowing and of willing in which the will of God, which must be the basis of a Confessional matter, proves itself to be meaningful. If this closer definition is relevant, then the following points may be made:

"1. A desirable and possible Confession of Faith must have the presupposition that the Church shares in certain special insights gained from the Scriptures; that she has won certain propositions which, until further notice, are the rigid representations of truth

which for her can only be transitory, and that she has gained these propositions in the hard struggle against theological lies and half truths; that to a degree she has become convinced of the accuracy and urgency of certain cardinal thoughts in her sermon; that she sees the necessity of laying down an 'Ebenezer' in a documentary witness over against herself and her environment. This witness is then a Confession of Faith. When and where has a true Confession of Faith been anything other than the result of a particular portion of the great history between the Bible and the Church, the conclusion of long, earnest theological arguments, and the expression of the peculiarly characteristic desire for Christian proclamation? A Confession without such a previous history, a Confession which was merely for its own sake, drawn up ut aliquid fieri videatur, would have no sense whatever. A Confession of Faith as a document for unity on the basis of humanitarian love, as an expression of a common wish or ideal, as a compromise between tendencies behind which there no longer exists vital Christian thought and which are therefore generally confessed because one no longer knows upon what ground they had once been fought, as a preamble to a Church constitution, because a Church constitution has to have a preamble with a confessional ring to it,

as beautiful flags which are left in the barracks when the regiment marches out, as all that kind of thing which would place a Confession of Faith completely in the air, would certainly not be - a Confession of Faith! A Confession of Faith without previous serious theological discussion would be shockingly boring, unoriginal, conciliatory, ineffective and with nothing to say.

Lord God! protect us from a Confession without characteristic, Biblical insights, without scars from a past battle, without the necessary desire, from a Confession which is dogmatically meaningless and which, indeed wishes to be meaningless! Should the repristination of an old Confession be what the questioners imagine, let it on no account be without an authentic commentary on it! The opposite would be laziness and at the same time cowardice. But now I must confess that I would be at a total loss if any one were to ask me what would be the events and forms which would characterise a Confession of Faith drawn up immediately following the theological history of the present and the recent past.

Where has there occurred in the theology of our time the erection of a great truth by which the Church felt herself seriously claimed, or of a great heresy by which she felt herself seriously and intolerably attacked?

Where is there an Athanasius, a Luther among us, not to

speak of those phenomena of an Augustine, a Thomas, a Calvin, who were not only stimulating and moving, but also shaped the movements they founded. What would be the special desire to which the Church has to bear witness ~~to~~ publicly to-day? Let us not delude ourselves: we are not living in a classical time of Protestant theology whose possibilities would permit us to speak out boldly. On the contrary, we are actually living between the times, burdened with the fatal pietistic-rationalistic inheritance of the last two centuries from which it is not as easy to get free, as some imagine who have not participated in the matter at first hand; and we stand before a future which we, armed with a few very modest modern tendencies, could only approach very anxiously. The Church should and can always have faith, even in such times as these of theological sifting and transition. Looking at the German and Swiss theology to-day, there exists no real possibility of a Confession of Faith. Is the situation different in France, Holland, England and North America? <sup>1</sup> It may be, of course, but one will have to

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1. N.B. This lecture was a report upon the World Conference of the Alliance of the Reformed Churches holding the Presbyterian system which met at Cardiff, Wales, in June and July of 1925. The report was given before a meeting of the Union of Reformed Churches in Germany at Duisburg-Meiderich, June 3, 1925. It is a matter of history that since that time the possibility of a genuine Confession of

come to us with very weighty arguments in order to persuade us of it, in order to persuade us that there are realities in this respect which we do not see, realities in present day theology which would permit a general Reformed Confession of Faith seem desirable and possible now.

"But now let us once suppose that the situation were wholly different from the one which I have just interpreted. Suppose we did not stand between the times but already were victoriously at the turn of the times, that is to say, in the midst of that theological history which precedes a Confession of Faith. Suppose we knew again what theological exegesis is and what a dogmatics worthy of the name is. Suppose that the flood of philosophical, historical and edifying dilettantism had subsided, or died away, and that therefore the Bible were read again as the Holy Scriptures and examined not on its religious but on its actual content; that once more one spoke about the Trinity and predestination, of Christology and sacrament, and other respectable things among theological professors and students, and at

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Faith has become a reality in Germany but the situation in England and North America is not greatly changed. No mighty compulsion appears to be upon the Church in our lands.

ministers' Conferences, so that it would no longer be pointless and boring but an event when now a general reformed Confession of Faith advanced to the battle-field with its earnest, preliminary decisions concerning such questions. Let us suppose that this Confession of Faith had then taken, for example, the very meaningful step, and had denoted by name the great (acknowledged by present-day Liberals as well as Positivists and orthodox) heresy which has prevailed in the midst of the last two centuries as that of Schleiermacher, and had repudiated it amicably yet firmly as ecclesiastically impossible. Very well and good! But there would still remain the other question, whether the second presupposition had been fulfilled, whereby the Confession knew that, according to the precedent of the Biblical prophets, it too had something to offer, that it had to have a 'Thus saith the Lord' to place upon the battle-field not only for doctrine but also for life and the actual situation. I confess that to me personally the problem of dogmatics (as the preliminary method) lies near or rather nearest to my heart. But I am well pleased when someone wants to blame me for it. In principle one can not will it. In this second respect the old Reformed Confession of Faith is based upon the presupposition that the Church had something to



say. With the old Reformers, knowledge of dogma had nothing to do with an abstract gnosis. It is completely ethos. The whole man, the entire State is claimed by the published parole de Dieu. The Confession of Faith proclaimed the honour of God not as a religious point of view but as the point of view above all others. As a creed it demands obedience. And it demands a quite definite attitude on the part of a pardoned, sinful people, not for the sake of a reward, and above all not for the sake of a purpose but, devoid of illusionary expectations, simply for the sake of obedience itself. Not as something about which much is to be said but as something which simply has to happen."<sup>1</sup>

"Just because the Confession of Faith is an act of the Church it can be no arbitrary act but on the contrary one which has been offered to the Church, an act of obedience because the Lord of the Church Who alone can be Jesus Christ, has ordered the Confession. The question whether a Confession of Faith is desirable in our Churches can therefore be allowed to fall, since it is quite pointless. One can wish for a new bell or a new organ in the Church but not a new Confession. Peter did not previously wish for a Confession, but he was

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1. Ibid. p. 98 f.

queried about the Confession of the disciples, about the Confession of the Church, and thereupon, and not until then, did he confess himself. Confessing, in the sense of Matthew 10, is not the satisfaction of a need, not even of the need of the Church concerning its pronouncements, its fellowship, the assurance of its self-preservation, and the limitations of its ecclesiastical domain but quite apart from any need, simply and solely the execution of a commission.

..... One finds no trace of intellectual "Eros", of a desire for speculation as such, in the Unitarian and Christological Confessions of the old Church, much less in the Confessions of the Reformation. One finds only the concern to be and to remain obedient within and in the face of intellectual and speculative possibilities which had become real for them and above all the desire to fulfil properly the commission of Christ. Answers are always given in a Confession of Faith, but not answers to self-conceived questions. Answers are given to questions which have been put to the Church in a particular situation by Jesus Christ Himself; hence they must inevitably be answered. God protect our Churches and all other Churches from Confessions which are not answers, but which are rather the result of arbitrary inquisitiveness! We would do

well to reflect that the answer, and therefore the obedience, and hence the Confession itself, could also be one of silence! It is both eloquent and confessional when it is obedience."<sup>1</sup>

"As the Church confesses she explains in the form of that answer which she gives to her Lord, that she is not ashamed of it, but that on the contrary her very existence as a Church depends upon her Confession. While she confesses she makes it known, and so to speak exposes the fact, that she is the community of those who belong to Jesus Christ and are responsible to Him. To be sure, she does this only in faith, and therefore her confession is essentially a Confession of Faith! 'We believe, and therefore we speak' (II Corinthians 4:13). Just as the Confession of Faith is not a declaration of the convictions and views of the confessor, so it is neither an oath of allegiance nor certification of one's loyalty. On the contrary, it is an assertion about the objective fact on the ground of which they are believers and therefore confessors. And this objective fact is quite directly Jesus Christ Himself. To believe on Him is to be in the Church, and that means

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1. Theologische Existenz heute, No. 29, Das Bekenntnis der Reformation und unser Bekennen, p. 7 f.

to confess Him before men (Matthew 10:32). If a Confession is demanded of us, then we are questioned about Him Himself. 'Whom do men say that I the Son of Man am?..... Whom say ye that I am?' so runs the question (Matthew 16:13f). And the answer which the Confession of Faith declares: 'Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God'. The simplest explanation of this is: not, as the people say, this one or that one but Jesus is the Lord! And not, as the people say, this or that but the Lord is Jesus! It would be easy to show that the Confessions of the Old Church, as well as those of the Reformation, wished to be nothing other than explanatory repetitions of this Confession. Confession means confession of the Messiah, as the 'good confession' of Jesus Himself (I Timothy 6:13) has already been His confession of Himself as the Messiah (Mark 14:62, 15:2)."<sup>1</sup>

"The Confession of Faith always contains explicitly or implicitly a polemic, a negation, a damnamus. In the interest of an unbiased appreciation of this fact, one must above all make clear to oneself that it has no other meaning than that of denoting the boundary which the confessional declaration defines. Assuredly a genuine Confessional Church only wishes to say "Yea"

with her Confession. Because this possibility always remains open to her, there exists the special temptation of desiring to avail herself of it. The 'men' utter another 'yea', possibly many other 'yeas'. The papal Church uttered a legalistic 'yea'; the fanatics a lawless 'yea'. Both likewise uttered a 'yea' of justification by works. That was the temptation in which the Reformation Confessions originated. A Church could not and cannot possibly pronounce her 'yea' without it being bounded and defined by an expressed or silent 'no' with which she conquers this temptation. Hence: damnamus! One further considers that the Confession of Faith, so far as it is a polemic, always concerns the Confessional Church herself. 'Judge not!' (Matthew 7:1). In Confession one does not judge others; on the contrary, in Confession the Church judges herself. She confesses to an error, to a denial, perhaps to a blasphemy which has become a reality in her midst. She confesses to her own fallibility and her own worldliness. She confesses herself a Church of sinners. "Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee" (John 21:17). A damnamus by which the Church were not grieved with herself, would not be the boundary to a Confessional 'yea'.

and it certainly would not be a powerful 'no'. The negation ultimately occurs in the Confessions of Faith only when it can be the reverse side of the acknowledgment of the Lordship of Jesus Christ; that is, for the sake of the unity of the Church, the true fellowship of her present and future members, and above all, for the sake of Christian love properly understood. Whoever wishes to quote the word 'God is love' in a discussion about this question should not forget that the same four chapters of the first Epistle of John, in which one finds this word, begins by establishing the separation of the spirits by the Confession.

"The Confession of Faith automatically exercises Church discipline without all the painfulness of ecclesiastical legalism. The Church may be tolerant only when and where she may; that is to say, when and where she must not exercise Church discipline. She may not want to be tolerant as a matter of principle. There are spirits which do not confess that Jesus is come in the flesh. These are spirits which destroy the unity, the fellowship and the love in the Church. To tolerate such spirits, to spare them the remonstrance that they are 'not of God', would neither correspond to the love of God nor to the love of the brethren, nor would it be well done for the sake of these spirits themselves.

This purifying remonstrance is the practical meaning of the damnamus. That it occasionally results in wild shouting, invectives, and even a few executions certainly may not necessarily belong to the matter itself. The trembling and quaking before these possibilities, which since the 18th century still continues to afflict all members, may not be given as a reason for our abandoning such a remonstrance. With her remonstrance, with her damnamus the Church guards the secret of grace not only for herself but for those of whom it is written: 'They went out from us, but they were not of us' (I John 2:19). How seriously the question is raised whether her Confession occurs in obedience or arbitrariness, does not need to be specially underlined. From this standpoint, and only from this standpoint, could a meaningful criticism of much of the ecclesiastical intolerance of the past and present be exercised.

"If a Confessional Church is truly Church, identical with the ecclesia una sancta catholica et apostolica, and if she therefore truly confesses Jesus Christ, then her Confession necessarily occurs in a definite relation and binding. Jesus Christ is no idea, of which the Church in some way could take possession. On the contrary, Jesus Christ is the historical reality to Whom the Scriptures of the Old Testament point and to Whom

those of the New Testament point back. The Church cannot confess except on that rock on which Jesus Christ wishes to build her, and on which He does build her, and without which she would not be a Church. And that rock is the original witness of the apostles with and in which the witness of Moses and the prophets is confirmed. By reflection upon the question which is demanded of her, 'Whom say ye that I am?' there will be concrete reflection, new reflection on what the Scriptures have to say to her concerning Him."<sup>1</sup>

"When a Church truly confesses, it confesses in the freedom of the Holy Spirit. 'For it is not ye that speak, but the spirit of your Father which speaketh in you' (Matthew 10:20). And 'wherefore I give you to understand, that no man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed: and that no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost' (I Corinthians 12:3). This wishes to say: The Church does not confess on the ground of any one known and observable possibility which is open to her; and therefore she does not confess intentionally, nor according to rules, nor as a result of assurances which she could previously consider and over which she was to make general statements. On the contrary, she confesses because and

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1. Ibid. p. 9 f.



while simultaneously the necessity is laid upon her to confess and the opportunity is given to her to do so by the revelation of God, that is, by Jesus Christ, and concretely by the Holy Scriptures as they speak to her in a definite situation. .... One cannot postulate, plan, will, nor make a Confession of Faith. As foreseen in Romans 10, when it does not follow faith as thunder follows the lightning; when it does not come like a mountain stream in Spring, breaking down all barriers; when it does not come because Jesus Christ must become known in a quite definite way, and then, independent of whether it is being well done or not, is not immediately confessed, just as was the case four hundred years ago; when one, perhaps without first knowing what one could confess, must first discuss whether one wants to confess at all; when one is not certain of his 'Yeas' and 'Nays'; when one must conceal it under general, pious phrases, under a formal compromise, or under an avalanche of Biblical quotations - then there arises just what should arise, certainly not a Confession of Faith! However, this further is to be said: when it comes to a question of a Confession of Faith, one knows that the Word with which the Church is charged is at once her defence and offence, her only defence and offence! For her there can be no other

concern outside of the concern for the truth, that is to say, outside of the concern for a true responsibility to the Word of God. Consequently there will not be a concern for the sympathy which she would lose or gain, for example, nor a concern for a success which the Confession could win for <sup>the</sup> external existence of the Churches. All such considerations are therefore superfluous because, according to Matthew 10, the Confessional Church under all circumstances comes to stand in the shadow of the Cross, in order just there to be comforted with the promise that the gates of hell shall not prevail against her. Neither will the concern for the beloved peace within the Church and with her environment be permitted to utter the decisive word. That a Church is a 'people's Church' can only mean that she is a Church for this people, a Church serving this people from the heart but with the Word of God. It does not mean that she must have regard for the popular dislike for her decisions and separations. Again we read in Matthew 10 the words, whose meaning is all too clear, concerning what can and perhaps must take place between father and son, mother and daughter, between daughter-in-law and mother-in-law, and among members of one's own family when the Church's Confession is at stake. On the other hand, one will not be able to deny to the

Confession a concern for the necessary outward unity of the Church. The Church finds her visible unity precisely in her Confession of Faith, or she does not find it at all! Or she finds it only apparently and not in such a way as to be able to oppose a genuine menace from without with a closed front..... The victory of the Church is the victory of her Lord. Her participation in it is her obedience. In obedience she does not have to ask about the strong 'battalions' but about the truth. And for the sake of the truth she must be able to sacrifice an apparent unity - all strategy and tactics to the contrary - for the sake of a real unity and therefore for the sake of the Confession of Faith."<sup>1</sup>

It is also often asserted that one condition of a Confession of Faith in our day is that it must at all events satisfy the results of historical criticism, and that above all it must meet the claims of the intellectual conscience of the modern man.<sup>2</sup> Now we do not minimise the importance of these things in their place. Not forgetting Copernicus and Kant, and the introductory science to the New Testament together with its so ensured

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1. Ibid. p. 13 f.

2. Ibid. p. 15.

results! This, however, is certain: when the Church shall once again confess its faith, the intellectual conscience will then give to men an opportunity to say nothing more nor less than just that which they will have to say out of faith, apart from all other considerations. Their Confession will then have to contradict the modern age just as it has done so often in olden times.

"Whether it corresponds to, or contradicts the times or not, in any case it belongs to the signs of the End-time (Endzeit). Hence, are all those concerns for the Confession of Faith so pointless. For wherever it is confessed, the Kingdom of God has come nigh. Behind the human decision for Christ the Lord which takes place on earth, there is in heaven the decision of the Lord for the Confessor. 'Whosoever therefore shall confess Me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in Heaven. But whosoever shall deny Me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in Heaven' (Matthew 10:32f). Because according to Matthew 10:28 there is a greater concern than for those who kill the body, Church politics and intellectual consciences have ultimately nothing to say in the matter of a Confession of Faith."<sup>1</sup>

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1. Ibid. p. 15 f.

Section 4: Appeal for a Preparedness for the  
Confessional Word.

If we have given heed to what we have heard in the preceding three sections of this chapter, we may be disposed to acknowledge the desirability and, indeed, the necessity of the Church confessing her faith anew in our day. But we have seen that our desire for a creed will not have the effect of producing one. We have seen that the presupposition of a Confession of Faith is the Will of God, His mercy and condescension. What, then, is the possibility of a genuine confessing of the faith for us? What are the signs of the times? "Are our Reformed Churches, singly or together, in the position to think the thoughts of a Reformed Confession of Faith? Is there the simplicity or the cleverness among us to accomplish this task as it must be done? Does Peter believe that the waves of the sea will carry him? Is it really for Christ's sake that he wants to set out upon this way? If so, then he will not hesitate a moment to do it."<sup>1</sup>

"I do not wish to invite anything other than a readiness. Actually the moment is not yet come for us to make the Reformation Confession expressly our own -

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1. die Theologie und die Kirche, p. 86.

and no amount of dialectic will help us - nor is the time ripe for us to make a new one. Were circumstances otherwise, we would already be confessing, instead of speaking about a Confession and confessing. We would not then discuss whether the teaching of the Reformers could also become our teaching to-day, but we would then have only the single concern, namely, to derive from the teaching of the Reformers the consequences for the doctrine with which we are charged to-day. We would then be in the midst of dealing concretely with such questions as to how we should speak of the Reformation Confession of Faith, and as to what we must of necessity confess to-day. Because such is not the case, because we apparently still have time for the formal question, one can only advise all those who are not asleep in these matters, all those who are either awake or will be, to take the solemn vows of their ordination with literal earnestness, each in his own place and in the freedom of the status quo, and therefore to exercise themselves unceasingly and untiringly in a sermon of the Gospel of Christ on the ground and under the guidance of the Holy Scriptures according to the principles of the evangelical, Reformed Churches, and to accustom themselves and their congregations to the Reformation Confession of Faith as a good and necessary

example for their own confessing. I emphasise themselves and their congregations. The fight of the German Confessional Church suffers in many places to-day because, although the ministers were fairly well prepared for it, the congregations were not. We thank God that we have time to accustom ourselves and our congregations to a Confession of Faith. In doing so we and they will become prepared for the moment in which the status quo will actually be overhauled. When and how it will come, and what there will then be to do - to make suppositions concerning that, and on the basis of them to make plans, and where possible to make experiments, has no sense at all! There is sense, however - and that can be the point of our treatment of the matter here - if we endeavour to make clear to ourselves the conditions under which we will alone do the right thing in that moment."<sup>1</sup>

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1. Theologische Existenz heute, No. 29, Das Bekenntnis der Reformation und unser Bekennen, p. 30 f.
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PART II.

THE MATERIAL QUESTION.



CHAPTER I.

ANALYSIS and COMPARISON of the BARMEN  
CONFESSION with the STANDARDS of  
the REFORMED CHURCH.<sup>1</sup>

Section 1: The Material Question Defined.

In Part I of our thesis we have attempted to answer the question, What is a Confession of Faith? As a result, we should now be familiar with "The Relation of Karl Barth to the Historic Creeds and Standards of the Church" from the standpoint of this formal question. Our study so far ought to have taught us that Barth is no slavish adherent to the Confessions of the Reformation.

1. The Reformed Church standards used in this analysis and comparison are as follows:-

- a. The Theses Bernensis, of 1528.
- b. Confessio Helvetica Prior 1536.
- c. Confessio Helvetica Posterior 1566.
- d. Calvin's Catechism.
- e. The Heidelberg Catechism.
- f. Confessio Gallica 1559.
- g. Confessio Belgica 1561.
- h. Confessio Scotica 1560.
- i. The National Covenant of Scotland 1638.
- j. The Book of Common Order.
- k. The First Book of Discipline.
- l. The Second Book of Discipline.
- m. The Westminster Confession of Faith.

Quotations have been made from P. Schaff, The Creeds of the Evangelical Protestant Churches, and Dunlop's Collection of Confessions of Faith, 1722, Vols. I and II.

Since Confessions are simply expositions of the Scriptures, they are capable of being altered, revised, even replaced, or newly interpreted. A new Confession might well be written which, while not contradicting the old symbols, differs from them considerably. Such a Confession has been issued by the synod of the German Evangelical Church at Barmen, May 1934. The synod was composed of representatives of Lutheran, Reformed and United Churches. All of them subscribed to the Confession which immediately became a basis of a partial union among them. The Barmen Confession of Faith was written by Karl Barth. By an analysis and comparison of this document with those of the 16th century, we will seek to show in what material respects Barth differs from the Reformed Fathers while at the same time not repudiating their confessional position. In other words, we will attempt to compare Barth's doctrines with those laid down in our historic standards, or, better stated, the interpretations he gives to those doctrines. This involves a detailed comparison of the Barmen Confession, proposition for proposition, with the confessional literature of our Church. The analysis and comparison will be restricted to the six evangelical truths set forth in the Barmen Confession. It is interesting to note that four months previous to the

appearance of the Confession of the German Evangelical Church, Barth had written a Confession for the Reformed Church, of which he is a member. A complete translation of the German text of these two Confessions is given in the Appendix to this thesis. Literally hundreds of Confessions have been published within recent years in Germany, but the Barmen Declaration has gained the greatest authority.

By the material question we mean the determination of Barth's theological teachings in relation to the confessed doctrine of our Church. A special, concluding chapter on the significance of the Barmen Confession will be included in this second part of our work.

The terms formal and material are purely arbitrary. We use them to distinguish logically between the form and the dogmatic content of a Confession. When we speak of the content of a Confession in this connection we mean the dogmatic propositions of which it is composed. There is, however, a danger of forgetting that our distinction between form and content is purely an intellectual distinction. The real content of a Confession, in so far as it is proclamation, is Jesus Christ, Who, except in thought, can never be separated from the form of a Confession. As we learned in Part I, we encounter the person, Jesus Christ, not above but in the proclamation of the Church, in the words of man.

If we do not meet Jesus Christ in the proclamation of the Church, and hence in the Church's Confession of her faith, we will not meet Him at all. If this fact were clearly realised, there might be engendered in us a genuine love for the Confessions, in spite of their fallibility and short-comings.

We have also seen that the form of a true Confession consists in an affirmation of the Lordship of Jesus Christ, and an implicit or explicit polemic, negation or damnamus. As we examine the dogmatic content of the symbols, we will observe how this form is preserved. In fact, we will discover how all those principles which we have learned in Part I are realised and preserved. We will see how the Church had to confess in the face of heresies which destroyed her unity; why a formulated Confession is necessary; how the Church places her Confession deliberately under the Scriptures; how the Confession is an answer to and an interpretation of the Word of God in the Bible; how the Church finds and preserves her unity in her Confession; and how the marks of a true Confession are exhibited. And we will see how a Confession exercises a power and an authority not only upon its confessors but also upon the political and social life of a nation. Lastly, the real greatness of Karl Barth as a theologian will be manifested

in our analysis and comparison of the Confessions of the Reformed Church.

Section 2: The Scriptural Principle.

Article I.

"Jesus Christ as He is testified to us in Holy Scripture, is the one Word of God which we have to hear, and which we have to trust and obey in life and in death.

"We reject the false doctrine that the Church might and must acknowledge as sources of its proclamation apart from and beside this one Word of God still other events, powers, forms and truths as God's revelation."

The fundamental doctrine of all Reformed Church Confessions is that of Holy Scripture. The only Reformed Confession which does not contain a statement of the Scriptural Principle is the First Confession of Basel, of 1528, but it concludes with this noteworthy sentence: "We submit our Confession to the judgment of the divine Scriptures, and hold ourselves ready always thankfully to obey God and His Word, if it should be corrected out of said Holy Scripture."<sup>1</sup> We see that the Barmen Confession is no exception to this rule.

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1. "Postremo, hanc nostram Confessionem iudicio Sacrae Biblicae Scripturae subijcimus: eoque pollicemur, si ex praedictis Scripturis in melioribus instituamur (etwas besseren berichtet), nos omni tempore Deo et sancrosancto ipsius verbo, maxima cum gratiarum actione, obsecuturos esse."

In the introductory appeal to evangelical congregations and Christians of Germany it urges them "to try the spirits whether they are of God. Prove also the words of the Confessional Synod of the German Evangelical Church whether they agree with the Holy Scriptures and the confessional writings of the Fathers. If you find that we speak contrary to Scripture, then do not listen to us." Nearly 400 years ago we find the same attitude expressed in the introduction to the Confessio Scoticana. We give the Scottish version: "Protestand that gif onie man will note in this our Confessioun onie Artikel or sentence repugnand to Gods holie word, that it wold pleis him of his gentleness and for Christian Charities sake to admonish us of the same in writing; and we upon our honoures and fidelitie, be Gods grace do promise unto him satisfaction from the mouth of God, that is, fra his holy scriptures, or else reformation of that quhilk he sal prove to be amisse. For God we take to recorde in our consciences, that fra our hearts we abhorre all sectis of heresie and all teachers of erronious doctrine: and that with all humilitie we imbrace the purity of Christ's Gospell, quhilk is the onelie fude of our sauls, and therefoir sa precious unto us, that we ar determined to suffer the extremest of wardlie danger, rather than that we will suffer ourselves

to be defraudit of the sam. For heirof we ar maist certainlie perswadit, that quhasumever denieis Christ Jesus, or is aschamit of him in the presence of men, sal be denyit befoir the Father, and befoir his haly Angels. And therefoir be the assistance of the michtie Spirit of the same our Lord Jesus Christ, we firmelie purpose to abide to the end in the confessioun of this our faith."

The Reformed Confessions acknowledged fundamentally and primarily the authority of Scripture. They regarded themselves strictly as interpretations of Scripture, and therefore subordinate to it. But in so far as they were, by God's grace, in agreement with Scripture, they were binding upon their confessors. Hence, the statement at the end of the First Scottish Confession we have just quoted: "we firmelie purpose to abide to the end in the confessioun of this our faith". Similarly the Barmen Confession states: "But if you find that we are in accordance with Scripture, then let no fear or enticement prevent you from taking the way of faith and obedience to the Word of God with us".

A Confession, when it is a Confession of Faith, is binding. The articles which a member of the Church confesses are truths by which he is bound. They are never truths which he selects, discovers and adopts.

They are strictly truths or insights which have imposed themselves upon him. They are truths which claim the man, and exercise a complete mastery over him. But the power of these truths - and therefore the power of a Creed - lies in the fact that these truths proceed from the Word of God in Scripture. Faith-knowledge takes its rise from its Object and finds expression in the symbols. In distinction to all other kinds of knowledge, faith-knowledge confesses without first asking how it knows. It is the opposite of all philosophical, religious or so-called theological speculation. It is rather a penetrating and humbling criticism by the Word. So begins the National Covenant of Scotland. "We all, and every one of us underwritten, protest, that after long and due examination of our owne Consciences in matters of true and false Religion, we are thoroughly now/resolved in the Trueth by the Word and Spirit of God: And therefore we believe with our Hearts, confesse with our mouths, subscribe with our Hands and constantly affirme before God and the Whole World, that this onely is the true Christian Faith and Religion pleasing to God and bringing Salvation to Man, which now is, by the Mercie of God, revealed to the World by the preaching of the blessed Evangel."

In its introduction, the Confessio Fidei Gallicani



of 1559, which was originally prepared by Calvin and his pupil, De Chandieu, reads as follows: "For the articles of our faith, which are all declared at some length in our Confession, all come to this: that since God has sufficiently declared His will to us through His prophets and apostles, and even by the mouth of His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, we owe such respect and reference to the Word as shall prevent us from adding to it anything of our own, but shall make us conform entirely to the rules it prescribes". Such then is the spirit in which the first Reformed Confessions were written. We recognise the same temper in the Barmen articles of 1934. The confessors are under a compulsion to confess what is above and over them. They point away from themselves and their Confessions to that Word which has called it forth. The documents themselves are human sign-posts, but sign-posts, nevertheless, which must be set up at all costs. Behind each dogmatic assertion there is a terrific urgency, an absolute necessity.

The Scriptural Principle of the Barmen Confession makes three positive statements and one negative one. Actually they may all be stated positively as follows:

1. The Word of God is Jesus Christ.
2. The Word of God is one.
3. The Word of God is testified to in Scripture.
4. The Word of God is the only source of revelation.

Let us now compare each of these propositions with

parallel ones in the historic standards of our Church.

1. The Word of God is Jesus Christ.

Let us direct our attention to the Heidelberg Catechism. This chief symbol of the Reformed Church in Germany nowhere directly declares that the Word of God is Jesus Christ. In answer to Question 117, What belongs to such prayer as God is pleased with and will hear? We read: "First, that from the heart we call upon the one true God, who has revealed Himself in His Word". In the answer to Question 21, What is true faith? we find these words: "It is not only a certain knowledge whereby I hold for truth all that God has revealed to us in his Word". The reply to Question 54 concerning the Holy Catholic Church distinguishes between the Son of God, His Spirit and Word. And Question 33 teaches that "Christ alone is the eternal, natural Son of God". These are the pertinent passages in the Heidelberg Catechism. From them it is abundantly clear that a sharp distinction is made between the Word and Christ or the Son of God. And yet we are not justified in jumping to the conclusion that when the Heidelberg speaks of the Word it means the Scriptures as such. That is to draw a conclusion which may be true, but which nevertheless does not inevitably follow from the

sentences we have quoted. Barth in his Dogmatics makes a distinction between the Word of God and revelation. He teaches, moreover, that the Word of God has a threefold form as revealed, written and proclaimed. The Heidelberg, in part, makes the same distinction in distinguishing between Christ and the Word. Barth, of course, teaches the unity of the Word of God in its threefold form, and the Barmen Confession says outright: the Word of God is Jesus Christ. The Heidelberg Catechism does not go as far as this. It does not identify Jesus Christ with the Word. Here we ought not to infer that the authors of the Heidelberg would necessarily disagree with the Barmen article. Indeed, there is a clue which would lead us to believe that the Heidelberg is in fact in agreement at this point. For, note carefully, the Heidelberg makes a distinction between the Word and Christ, or between the Word and the Son of God. It does not say Jesus Christ! as the Barmen Confession does, however. And when the Heidelberg says Christ or Son of God, it does not mean exactly what the Barmen means when it says Jesus Christ. When the Heidelberg uses the terms Christ or Son of God, it means expressly the eternal Son of God.<sup>1</sup> It is thinking

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1. See Ques. 33.

of God in His eternal mode of existence as Son. On the other hand, when the Barmen Confession here speaks of Jesus Christ it means expressly the eternal Son incarnate, defined, limited and localised. Thus, there is the possibility, no, the likelihood, that if the Heidelberg had spoken of Jesus Christ, and not simply of Christ or the Son of God, it would have had to identify the Word with Him as the Barmen proposition does. It is to be noted here that neither the Heidelberg nor the Barmen Confession identify the Word directly with Scriptures.

We turn now to Calvin's Catechism. It teaches (1) God's Word is found in Scripture,<sup>1</sup> and (2) God's Word is Scripture,<sup>2</sup> and (3) God's Word is proclaimed.<sup>3</sup> In this section Calvin's Catechism does not declare that the Word of God is Jesus Christ, although it is interesting to note that he makes the same distinctions between the Word in itself, written and proclaimed as Barth does in his dogmatics.

In the Confessio Fidei Gallicana, also from the pen of Calvin, we find a similar distinction and unity

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1. Calvin's Catechism, Ques. 301.

2. Ibid. Ques. 304.

3. Ibid. Ques. 304, 305.

in the Word of God. "Secondly, and more clearly, in His Word, which was in the beginning revealed through oracles, and which was afterward committed to writing in the books which we call the Holy Scriptures."<sup>1</sup>

Section VI of this French Confession states explicitly that the Son is God's Word and wisdom.

The Confessio Belgica teaches that God "commanded His servants, the Prophets and Apostles, to commit His revealed word to writing..... Therefore we call such writings holy and divine Scriptures."<sup>2</sup> Here as well, then, the Word is represented as being in at least two states, that of the revealed Word and that of the written Word. Like the Heidelberg and the Confessio Gallicana, the Confessio Belgica identifies the Word with the Son.<sup>3</sup> It further declares that "the Father, by the Word - that is, by his Son - created of nothing the heavens, the earth and all creatures".<sup>4</sup>

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1. Sec. II. "Secondement et plus clairement, par sa Parole, laquelle au commencement révélée par oracles, a été puis après rédigée par écrit aux livres, que nous appelons l'Ecriture sainte."

2. Art. III.

3. Art. X.

4. Art. XII.

The Confessio Helvetica Prior maintains in the first article: Scriptura canonica Verbum Dei, and in agreement with the preceding Confessions it states, Article VI, that the Word is God's Son. Qui ut considerit per verbum, id est, Filium suum. The Confessio Helvetica Posterior of 1566 is even clearer and more definite on this point. It unequivocally declares that the canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the true Word of God.<sup>1</sup> This second Helvetic Confession also speaks of the Word of God as the Word of God preached.<sup>2</sup> And finally this Confession also speaks of the Word in its third form as the eternal Word by which God created all things.<sup>3</sup> Thus

1. Ch. I, Art. 1. Credimus et confitemur, Scripturas Canonicas sanctorum Prophetorum et Apostolorum utriusque Testamenti ipsum verum esse verbum Dei, et auctoritatem sufficientem ex semetipsis, non ex hominibus habere. Nam Deus ipse loquutus est Patribus, Prophetis, et Apostolis, et loquitur adhuc nobis per Scripturas Sanctas.
2. Ch. I, Art. 4. Proinde cum hodie hoc Dei verbum per praedicatores legitime vocatas annunciatur in Ecclesia, credimus ipsum Dei verbum annunciari et a fidelibus recipi, neque aliud Dei verbum vel fingendum, vel coelitus esse expectandum: atque in praesenti spectandum esse ipsum verbum; quod annunciatur, non annunciantem ministrum, qui, etsi sit malus et peccator, verum tamen et bonum manet nihilominus verbum Dei.
3. Chap. VII, Art. 1. Deus hic bonus et omnipotens creavit omnia, cum visibilia, tum invisibilia per verbum suum coaeternum.

Barth has an excellent precedent for his doctrine of the Word of God in its threefold form in the Confessio Helvetica Posterior. But - and this is the question we are concerned with here - the Helvetica nowhere maintains that Jesus Christ is the Word of God. The most it does is to teach that the eternal Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, was begotten of the Father from all eternity in an ineffable manner.<sup>1</sup>

We turn now to a consideration of the Confessio Scotica and finally to the Westminster Confession. The former in Article XIX on The Authority of the Scriptures says nothing about them being the Word of God. But elsewhere in several passages it speaks of the Scriptures as the Word, and in Article XXII concerning the Sacraments, it mentions the preaching of the Word. Nothing is said of the Word in connection with Jesus Christ, Christ or Son of God in the Confessio Scotica. The Westminster Confession regards the words Scripture and Word of God as alternative terms. It reads: "Under the name of holy Scripture, or the Word of God, are now

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1. Chap. XI, Art. Credimus praeterea et docemus, Filium Dei Dominum nostrum Jesus Christum ab aeterno praedestinatum vel praeordinatum esse a Patre salvatorem mundi.

contained all the Books of the Old and New Testaments"<sup>1</sup> and it proceeds to enumerate the books. In Section IV of Chapter I it reiterates that the Scriptures are the Word of God Who is the Author of them. Chapter VII and Section VI speaks of the preaching of the Word<sup>2</sup> and Chapter XXI and Section V of a reading, hearing and preaching of the Word. The Westminster appears to attribute another meaning to the Word than that of Scripture and proclamation where it mentions the Word dwelling in men,<sup>3</sup> although it is not expressly stated. Curiously enough, however, when the Westminster Confession and certain other symbols deal with the subject of the Church, they declare that "there is no other head of the Church but the Lord Jesus Christ".<sup>4</sup> Therefore unless Jesus Christ is to be thought of in abstracto He must be in some way identified with Scripture and the Word of God to which is ascribed all power and authority in Chapter I.

As a result of our survey of the confessional standards of the Reformed Church we learn that the

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1. Chap. I, Sec. II.
  2. See also Chap. X, Secs. I, III, IV; Chap. XIV, Sect. I.
  3. See Chap. I, Sec. VII; Chap. XIII, Sec. I.
  4. Chap. XXV, Sec. VI.



Barmen Confession is quite unique in declaring that Jesus Christ is the Word of God. We repeat: we dare not infer from this that the Barmen article is a contradiction of the historic symbols of our Church. On the contrary, it is to be regarded as a clarifying and complementary exposition of Reformed theology. For there is a danger of serious misunderstanding in saying that the Word is Christ, the eternal Son of God on the one hand, and in saying that the Word is the Scriptures on the other. The two statements ought properly to be brought together in the closest relationship - indeed in a complete unity. That is done when the Barmen Confession speaks of Jesus Christ. The separation of the person of Jesus Christ into Jesus and Christ has been, at least for the doctrine of the Word of God, very disastrous for modern Protestant theology. It has given rise to perverse conceptions of Scripture - to the fundamentalist view of Scripture as the Word of God in itself and as such, or to the symbolic conception of the Word as expounded by Tillich,<sup>1</sup> and generally held by modern Liberalism. What has been badly needed is a Christological doctrine of the Word of God and of Scripture. For the first time this has

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1. See Chapter I, Section II of the Part I of this work.

been granted us in our Reformed standards by the Barmen Confession when it affirms that the Word of God is Jesus Christ. The term 'Jesus Christ' as applied to Scripture means that the Bible is at one and the same time the word of man and the Word of God in indissoluble unity. The paradox of Scripture corresponds to the paradox of the Person of Jesus Christ. Rightly understood we may properly say that the Scripture is Jesus Christ as one form of the Word of God.

Moreover, in confessing that Jesus Christ is the Word of God, the Barmen Confession closes the door to all impersonal and abstract views of Scripture. Knowledge of God in Scripture is not merely an intellectual comprehension of logical statements, although - we hasten to add - it is certainly that as well. Since the Word of God is the Person Jesus Christ our knowledge is above all a personal relationship requiring a decision. And again, when the Barmen Confession maintains that Jesus Christ is the Word of God it closes the door to all human presumption to possess and to manipulate the Word of God. For Jesus Christ as Person is free in the strictest sense of the word. He is free to give or to withhold Himself. The Barmen Confession ensures, as no other Reformed Confession does, that the Church does not possess the Word of God in

Scripture, but that the Word of God in Scripture possesses man. All static conceptions of Scripture are out of the question.

2. The Word of God is one.

This dogmatic proposition is the complement of the fourth proposition in the statement of the Scriptural Principle, namely, that the Word of God is the only source of revelation. But it is really more than that: it is, in fact, an exposition of the truth that there is only one source of revelation. For it is conceivable that the Word of God itself might be broken up into separate parts so that men might come to believe in two or three or more Words of God. Already we have noted that the historical Reformed Standards at different points speak of the Word of God written, the Word of God proclaimed and the Word of God eternal. Are these three Words of God or are they one and the same Word? The credal formulae of the Reformation do not answer this question. At most they imply their unity. But the Barmen Confession leaves no doubt about the matter. It states unmistakably - Jesus Christ the one Word of God. Consequently, any one who allows himself to be warned by this doctrine of the oneness and therefore the unity of the Word of God, will not be seeking for a

Word of God above or outside Scripture, nor expect to hear in preaching any other Word than Jesus Christ Himself. We are therefore persuaded that in the confession of the one Word of God as Jesus Christ Barmen represents a distinct advance upon the old documents.

The oneness and unity of the Word of God means that there can be no special revelations, insights, illuminations or guidance added to what is given in the Canon of Scripture. Hence, when the Oxford Grouper professes to receive special information (guidance) or revelations from the Spirit apart from the Word, he is denying the unity of the Word. A proper understanding of and adherence to the one in threeness and the three in oneness of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and of the Word of God revealed, written and proclaimed would ensure the unity of the Church and safeguard her on the one hand, against Roman Catholicism with its manufacturing of false dogmas and traditions equal in authority with the Scriptures, and on the other hand, against Anabaptists, Quakers, the Oxford Group and other malicious sects which rend the body of Christ with their arrogant religious presumption. The Barmen Confession with its assertion of the oneness and unity of the Word of God is at once a bulwark and an attack upon the Oxford Group. It has not been clearly enough perceived

that in the Oxford Group the Church is to-day confronted with the modern counterpart of the Anabaptists, against whom Luther and Calvin contended so vigorously. It is not surprising, then, that Barth should have exposed the Group Movement unsparingly in his pamphlet Kirche oder Gruppe. The Oxford Group arises from a lack of understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity, of separating the Spirit from the Word - as Calvin has so admirably shown.<sup>1</sup>

The Confessio Helvetica Posterior takes pains to condemn Jews and Mohammedans, and all who blaspheme the holy and adorable Trinity. Damnamus ergo Judaeos et Mahumetistas, omnesque sacrosanctam et adorandam hanc trinitatem blasphemantes.<sup>2</sup>

Finally, the Barmen Confession that Jesus Christ is the one Word of God, i.e. the unity of the Word, "guarantees the unity of the Biblical witness, in spite of and within its utter multiplicity, in fact contradictoriness. The unity of the Bible guarantees the unity of the Church, in spite of and within the variety in the measure of faith, in which the Bible becomes revelation

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1. See Calvin's reply to Cardinal Sadolet's letter in Vol. I of the English translation of his Tracts of 1844.

2. Chap. III, Art. 5: compare also Confessio Scotica Art. Vi, and the Confessio Gallica.

to this man or that, and to this man or that to-day or to-morrow."<sup>1</sup>

This one Word of God which is Jesus Christ, the Barmen Confession further tells us, is the one Word which we have to hear, trust and obey in life and in death. Oh, how rich is this single article of faith from Barmen. It immediately recalls to our minds the opening question and answer of the Heidelberg Catechism. "What is thy only comfort in life and in death? That I, with body and soul, both in life and in death, am not my own, but belong to my faithful Saviour Jesus Christ." Its insistence upon the hearing of this one Word also recalls the opening article of the Theses Bernensis of 1528. "The holy Christian Church whose only Head is Christ, is born of the Word of God. It remains in the same and hears not the voice of a stranger."<sup>2</sup> We are commanded to hear no other Word than Jesus Christ, to put our trust in no other person or power, nor to offer obedience to any other Lord. In this article there is confessed at once the Lordship and sufficiency of Jesus Christ.

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1. Dogmatics, p. 131.

2. "Die heilige christliche Kirche, deren einiges Haupt Christus, ist aus dem Worte Gottes geboren; in dem selben bleibt sie, und hört nicht die Stimme eines Fremden."

3. The Word of God is testified to in Scripture.

Again in this proposition of the Barmen Confession we find a slight deviation from the historic standards of the Reformed Church. The Barmen Declaration takes the Scriptures quite seriously as witness, and therefore as human, temporal words. There appears to be no fear on the part of the Barmen Confession to point out the 'humanness' of the Bible. The Confessions of the 16th century do not do this, at least in those articles dealing expressly with the Scriptural principle. One is almost led to the opinion that the Reformed Fathers were afraid of denoting Scripture as witness, as word of man, for fear of detracting from the authority and divinity of Scripture - and this in spite of the fact that they did not hesitate to emphasise the humanity of Jesus Christ. The Confessio Helvetica Prior speaks of the Word of God as being 'delivered' to the world by the Prophets and Apostles.<sup>1</sup>

The Second Helvetic document speaks of God speaking by the Prophets and Apostles.<sup>2</sup> The Heidelberg tells us that the holy Gospel was 'proclaimed' by the Patriarchs and Prophets.<sup>3</sup> The Confessio Gallica teaches

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1. Art. I, "vorgetragen".

2. Chap. I, Art. I, "loquutus est".

3. Ques. 19, "lasse verkündigen".

that the Word was "committed to writing in the books which we call the Holy Scriptures".<sup>1</sup> The Confessio Belgica says that "God commanded his servants, the Prophets and Apostles, to commit his revealed Word to writing".<sup>2</sup> The Westminster Confession likewise speaks of "committing" into writing.

What are we to say to this? Were the old standards wrong and is the Barmen Confession correct? Or vice versa? The answer is: both are right. Dangers to the faith and therefore to the Church lurk in the old Confessions and in the modern one. The danger lying in the documents of the 16th century is in thinking of the Word of God as being magically transmitted to men, of conceiving the "committing of the Word to writing" in purely mechanistic and causal terms and of regarding the Prophets and Apostles merely as automatons, or tools in the hands of the Deity. There is also the danger of destroying that indirect and hidden relationship which God established with His creatures when one ceases to regard Scripture as a word of man, and therefore strictly as witness. There arises the view that

1. Art. II, "a été puis après rédigée par écrit".

2. Art. III, "il a commandé à ses serviteurs les Prophètes et Apôtres de rédiger ses oracles par écrit".



God has so thoroughly given Himself over to man that God can no longer withhold Himself from man, and hence is no longer free. There is the danger - already observed - of the Word of God becoming a human possession so that man, having the Word, no longer needs the Giver of the Word. In short, the danger lurking in the teaching of the old Confessions is that of scholastic Protestantism and of fundamentalism. Our Reformed Fathers did not see this danger: they were confronted by a different problem and a different situation. But we see this danger very clearly to-day. We know how a rational orthodoxy has stifled the spirit of the Gospel for centuries. The framers of the Barmen Confession evidently recognised this danger too, and so they confessed: Jesus Christus, wie er uns in der Heiligen Schrift bezeugt wird, ist das eine Wort Gottes.

At the same time the affirmation of Scripture as witness, as word of man, unless properly understood, is also fraught with danger. And here the old Confessions will exercise a necessary corrective. The idea of witness lies perilously near to the idea of symbol. Here again we have in mind Tillich's view of the Word as symbol. One can think of the Scriptures 'sacramentally', and of Jesus Christ as the one Word of God as the 'unconditioned'. If the Scripture as witness or sign

comes to signify a symbol, it will be reduced to one among many symbols such as art, music, the works of society and law in which the spirit immanently (or transcendently) finds expression as a general and non-historical truth. If the Scriptures as witness are not at the same time in which they really witness seem to be truly the Word of God, then the whole seriousness of the reality of the revelation of God as an event in history is destroyed. We frankly see this danger in defining Scripture as witness. How then are we rightly to understand the concept of witness or of testimony as used by the Barmen Confession?

"The Bible is not itself and in itself God's past revelation, but by becoming God's Word it attests God's past revelation and is God's past revelation in the form of attestation. .... To attest means to point in a definite direction beyond oneself to something else."<sup>1</sup>

"The Biblical witnesses point beyond themselves."<sup>2</sup>

"They speak and write not for their own sakes, nor for the sake of their deepest inner possession or even need but under orders of that something else."<sup>3</sup> And the

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1. Dogmatics, p. 125.

2. Ibid. p. 125.

3. Ibid. p. 125 f.

Biblical witness possesses authority in that it claims no authority for itself.<sup>1</sup> "Direct identification of revelation and the Bible..... is not to be pre-supposed or anticipated by us. It takes place as an event, when and where the word of the Bible becomes the Word of God, i.e. when and where the word of the Bible functions as the word of a witness, when and where John's finger points not in vain but really pointedly, when and where by means of its word we also succeed in seeing and hearing what he saw and heard. Therefore, where the Word of God is an event, revelation and the Bible are one in fact, and word for word one at that."<sup>2</sup>

"When we speak of revelation we are faced with the divine act itself and as such, which is the ground and the limit, the presupposition and the proviso of what may be said of the Bible and proclamation as the Word of God..... and revelation itself is nothing else than the freedom of God's grace."<sup>3</sup> To deny that the Word of God becomes the word of man in this freedom is to doubt whether God has come at all, just as to deny the humanity of Jesus Christ is to doubt a true coming of God to

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1. Ibid. p. 126.

2. Ibid. p. 127.

3. Ibid. p. 132.

man. Just as God reveals Himself as Creator - that is, distinguishes Himself from His creation - in the union of Himself and His creation in the man Christ Jesus, so God's Word manifests itself as essentially His Word as distinct from all human words in that union of His Word and man's word in the book called the Bible. The Chalcedonian dogma "very God and very man" must be applied to the Holy Scriptures.

4. The Word of God is the only source of revelation.

We have already seen how the Barmen Confession varies slightly but nevertheless significantly in the preceding propositions: The Word of God is Jesus Christ; the Word of God is one; and the Word of God is testified to in Holy Scripture. We now come to the fourth proposition given in the exposition of the Scriptural principle, The Word of God is the only source of revelation.

Here the Barmen Confession breaks away from the literal meaning of certain important Reformed Standards.

For the Confessio Gallicana, prepared by Calvin, the Confessio Belgica and the Westminster Confession explicitly speak of two sources of revelation, and consequently do seem to make room for a natural theology. None of the other Confessions of the Reformed Church

deal with a revelation in creation or in nature, but assign to Scripture the only source of doctrine, and strongly condemn all teachings at variance with Scripture. Remarkably enough, however, these three great Confessions also emphatically maintain that the Scriptures alone are authoritative for the Church's message, form and government. The truth is that the Reformers were not faced with the heresy of a natural theology based upon a misunderstanding of the doctrine of creation, such as the Church is faced with to-day. Accordingly, in their formulation of the doctrine of creation they did not always set it forth as truth known only in the revelation which is in Jesus Christ. They were guilty of conceiving creation cosmologically or philosophically.<sup>1</sup> But to charge them with deliberately erecting a knowledge of God in creation which could be known apart from the Word of God is unfair. It does not take into account the whole purpose and tenour of their polemics against Roman Catholicism which had given to reason and philosophy not merely a support to revelation, but actually an authority equal to it. The

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1. Karl Barth drew attention to this fact in the course of the Gifford Lectures delivered in Aberdeen, March 1937, which the writer was privileged to hear. Unfortunately the lectures will not be published until 1938, and we are therefore unable to quote from them.

Reformers never wished to propound an anthropology upon the basis of the fact of creation as a presupposition to an understanding of Christology. Nevertheless, we are bound to admit that in specific articles of the French, Belgic and Westminster Confessions, when they are considered separately and not in relation to the entire symbol, are open to the gravest criticism - and just where, let it be noted, they evidently wished to be letter-true to the Scriptures. Let us examine the relevant articles. The Confessio Gallicana and the Confessio Belgica may be grouped together as their teaching is substantially the same, whereas the Westminster varies considerably from them.

Confessio Gallicana,  
Art. 2.

As such this God reveals Himself to men; firstly, in his works, in their creation, as well as in their preservation and control. Secondly, and more clearly, in his Word, which was in the beginning revealed through oracles, and which was afterwards committed to writing in the books which we call the Holy Scriptures.

Confessio Belgica,  
Art. 2.

Of the knowledge of God we know him by two means: first, by the creation, preservation, and government of the universe; which is before our eyes as a most elegant book, wherein all creatures, great and small, are as so many characters leading us to contemplate the invisible things of God, namely His eternal power and Godhead, as the Apostle Paul saith (Rom. 1:20). <sup>which</sup> All things are sufficient to convince men, and leave them without excuse.

Secondly, he makes himself more clearly and more fully known to us by his holy and divine Word; that is to say, as far as is necessary for us to know in this life, to his glory and our salvation.

Let us immediately set the Barmen Declaration over against these two articles. "We reject the false doctrine that the Church might and must acknowledge as sources of its proclamation apart from and beside this one Word of God (which is Jesus Christ) still other events, powers, forms and truths as God's revelation." The issue is quite clear: the one contradicts the other two flatly.

The most damaging criticism which may be preferred against these two Confessions is this: when they tell us that the Word reveals God more clearly and more fully than does the creation and the works of God, one wonders whether they have even a proper understanding of the revelation of the Word of God itself. Is the knowledge we have of God in Jesus Christ on the same plane as all other human knowledge? Is it the same kind of knowledge? Do we acquire it in the same way? Is the knowledge which is given in the Word merely the complement, the extension or the fulfilment of our human rational knowledge? Is the knowledge given in the Word just the confirmation of what we know already? At least of what we know of our sin and misery? Do we start with a knowledge of ourselves and of our creatureliness, and then proceed to a knowledge of God in Christ? Do we first recognise our sin and guilt - our

being without excuse - and then find grace?

YES! we must answer, if we follow the order set forth in the Confessio Gallicana and the Confessio Belgica. OR - is the knowledge we have in the Word of God wholly other, as the Barmen Confession implies? Is it not unique, and to be distinguished from all other events, powers, forms and truths? If not, how is the Word of God to be distinguished from the many words of man, from his countless points of view, theories, philosophies and Weltanschauungen? How is the Word of God to assert itself as the Word of GOD? How - to push the inquiry to the end - how are even the Scriptures to be distinguished from the traditions of men? The truth of the matter is that if there is a revelation of God in creation apart from His revelation in Jesus Christ, then any real authority at all is lost, and the whole concept of the Word of God is destroyed.

The Gospel proclaims that knowledge of our sin and wretchedness is revealed in the man Jesus Christ when He allowed Himself to be crucified, when He bore the penalty, the shame and the agony of our guilt and punishment on Calvary. Only in the light of this fact do we see our sin and learn that we are without excuse. "But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared." (Ps. 130:4.) In the grace which streams



from the Cross we know that we are sinners and are under the wrath of God. Creation is as dumb here as it is about a forgiving, merciful Saviour. The sins and faults which are only too evident to us, and which all Arminians like the Oxford Group conceive to be the counterpart of grace, are infinitesimal in comparison with the depth of our sin and misery revealed in the death of Jesus Christ. A knowledge derived from creation can only manifest these puppet sins; Christ alone shows us our enmity towards God.

As Jesus Christ is the one Word of God Who reveals our sin and forgiveness, so is He alone the revealer of God the Father as Creator. And from this standpoint we must in charity now try to interpret anew the old Reformed standards which we have been ruthlessly attacking. Jesus Christ in His resurrection attests Himself as the Lord over life and death, and therefore over our whole existence. But the Lord of existence means Creator. Thus in the power of His resurrection Jesus Christ reveals the Father as Creator.<sup>1</sup> But this is

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1. Hence, the power by which Christ forgives sins in dying to sin and rising again is the same power with which He creates the world. There is not a cosmological power for creation and another so-called spiritual power for the work of reconciliation and redemption.

not a general truth, knowable antecedently or to be acquired by our own powers. Only in the event in which the eternal God in the person of the eternal Son became flesh in Jesus Christ was and is the distinction between God and man, the Creator and the creation made manifest. In the union of the God-man, Christ Jesus, we behold in faith the eternal distinction. Without this union of the two in one, all would remain simply one - and knowledge of the Creator as distinct from the creature in the Christian sense would be impossible. It could be that when the old confessional symbols speak of a revelation in the creation, preservation and government of all things, they meant that they were created, preserved and governed in and by Jesus Christ, the Word of God. "For by Him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones or dominions, or principalities or powers: all things were created by Him, and for Him: and He is before all things, and by Him all things consist" (Col. 1:16-17). Consequently, in Jesus Christ they could contemplate "the invisible things of God" in the things that are seen, even "His eternal power and Godhead". Jesus Christ is that event which brings together and is the being together of the invisible things of God and the visible things of creation. Nature

and history themselves, however, are dumb. Only in faith do we perceive the power and glory of the Creator. In the knowledge of faith we are without excuse.

Another thing which we ought to observe closely in connection with these old creeds by way of an apology for them: they do not say that God reveals Himself in nature and history as such, but in their creation, preservation and dominion. THIS IS THE WORK OF GOD. And the work of God is the speech of God by which He creates and upholds all things. "And the Lord God said . . . . ." (Gen. 1). There is the work of God whereby He has created all things good and there is the work of man and the devil, whereby God's creation is continually marred and disturbed. And there is God's work of preservation without which all things would go to pieces and perish. Obviously then, the work of God can not be deduced from nature and history themselves. It remains hidden and veiled. When these Confessions spoke of a revelation of God in creation, they evidently meant in the actus purus of creation, and not in creation as we know it. Thus there can be no real justifying of natural theology upon the basis of the Confessio Gallicana and the Confessio Belgica, in spite of the fact that their wording is exceedingly misleading. The Barmen Confession, however, will leave no

possibility for misunderstanding; it will leave no loop-holes. It will close the way to all authorities and wisdoms which would challenge and usurp the authority and glory of Jesus Christ in His Church.

Once more it might be said on behalf of the old Confessions that they meant to describe the Word of God in two forms of its existence, as the eternal Word the Creator and as the written Word the Scriptures. If this is how they really thought of revelation, they certainly did not manage to make themselves very clear.

The Westminster Confession of Faith is unique among Reformed Church standards in teaching unequivocally a natural theology. Whereas the *Confessio Gallicana* and the *Confessio Belgica* tell of a revelation in the actus purus of God's creation, the Westminster teaches that a revelation may be had from nature and creation as such. The first words of the symbol leave no doubt upon the matter. "Although the light of nature, and the works of creation and providence, do so far manifest the goodness, wisdom, and power of God, as to leave men inexcusable; yet they are not sufficient to give that knowledge of God, and of His will, which is necessary unto salvation."<sup>1</sup> The phrase naturae lumen betrays

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1. Chap. I, Art. I. Quancumque naturae lumen, operaque Dei cum Creationis tum Providentiae, bonitatem ejus, sapientiam, potentiamque eo usque manifestant, ut homines vel inde reddantur inexcusabiles. Cf. also Chapter XXI, Art. I.

the grievous error in this first article of the Westminster. It is unquestionably a point upon which modern theology could and does seek to justify itself. And it may well be that the true evangelical Church in the Anglo-Saxon world in her fight against the heresy of natural theology to-day will have to repudiate the Westminster Confession on this score alone. Certain it is, the Westminster symbol offers no emphatic defence against humanism, rationalism, and philosophies of nature and history as they insidiously and subtly present themselves in a natural theology. After all, the Church must recognise that Creeds and Confessions are not laws and dogmas in the Roman Catholic sense. They are sign-posts to the Word of God in Scripture and therefore subject to revision and even replacement, when their witness might thereby be bettered. Confessions and Creeds are to serve the Word of God. It has long been recognised by liberal theology that the Westminster Confession was to some extent the product of a Protestant scholasticism. But liberal theology has never been equal to the task of saying exactly what was wrong with the Westminster Articles. Having grown deaf to the Word of God, the Church no longer had ears to detect the voice of a stranger. Her eyes were no longer constantly fixed upon her Object so as to save

her from wandering into heretical by-paths. And once upon these paths, the path of faith and reason, of grace and nature, she found it hard to recover her true Object, direction and path. To-day the Word of God is again speaking mightily to us. And in the Word which God has spoken to the Church in Germany, and in the answer which the Church has given in her Barmen Confession, we are able to see in a flash, as it were, the weakness of the Westminster symbol.

The Westminster differs from all other Reformed Confessions in making a distinction between a saving knowledge of God, and a natural knowledge of God which condemns man, rendering him inexcusable. This saving knowledge it has pleased the Lord, at sundry times and in divers manners, to reveal to His Church.<sup>1</sup> Thus, once more the Westminster teaches two kinds and two sources of knowledge of God: a natural one outside the Church and a revealed one inside the Church. If the knowledge of God revealed in nature is not the same as that revealed in Scripture, then there must be two Churches. If, however, the knowledge is the same, why does the Westminster assert that the knowledge of God

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1. Chap. I, Art. I: eam tamen Dei, voluntatisque divinae cognitionem, quae porro est ad salutem necessaria, nequeunt nobis ingenerare.

given in nature and the works of creation is not sufficient for salvation? The doctrine of a knowledge of God in nature and history outside the Church naturally destroys the unity of the Church - as has actually taken place in Germany. In Germany there is a Church founded upon knowledge of God in Scripture alone - the Confessional Church - and there is the so-called Church of the "German Christians" which is founded upon the belief in a revelation of God in the history, creation and nature of the German people. Thus the body of Christ has been horribly rent, and the lie propounded that His body is not one!

The error which we exposed in the French and Belgic Confessions, namely that there is a knowledge of sin and judgment apart from Jesus Christ, as they aver, may be seen in the Westminster document as well. There is no ground in Scripture for the doctrine that nature and the works of creation afford us a knowledge of sin. Sin in the Bible, even when it is sin against our neighbour, is sin against God. But Jesus Christ alone reveals this. In uncovering our sin as sin against God, He manifests the righteousness of God which is atoning and redemptive for such as are of a broken spirit and a contrite heart. There is a distinction between a judging and saving knowledge of God, but that distinction is comprehended in Jesus Christ and not in a natural and special revelation.

Further evidence of a natural theology is to be found in Article V of Chapter I of the Westminster Confession of Faith.<sup>1</sup> There the Confession states that various facts - the testimony of the Church, the majesty of the style, the consent of all the parts, the heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine - are arguments whereby the word abundantly evidences itself to be the Word of God. The Word of God, however, as the revelation of what was unknown and could not be known must be self-evidencing truth. To suggest that rational evidences might be advanced for the Word of God is to imply <sup>with our natural faculties</sup> that we are in a position to judge what is the Word of God. But if we are in a position to judge the Word of God, then our reason or experience is above the Word. In that case, we are above the Word! The truth is we have no capacity in

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1. Chap. I, Art. V. Testimonium Ecclesiae efficere quidem potest ut de Scriptura sacra quam honorifice sentiamus; materies insuper ejus coelestis, doctrinae vis et efficacia, styli majestas, partium omnium consensus, totiusque scopus (ut Deo nempe omnis gloria tribuatur), plena denique quam exhibet unicae ad salutem viae commonstratio, praeter alias ejus virtutes incomparabiles, et perfectionem summam, argumenta sunt quibus abunde se Verbum Dei et luculenter probat; nihilominus tamen plena persuasio et certitudo de ejus tam infallibili veritate, quam auctoritate divina non aliunde naseitur quam ab interna operatione Spiritus Sancti, per verbum et cum verbo ipso in cardibus nostris testificantis.



us for the Word of God whatever. Of course, the capacity can be created in us; but we have no control over that. The creation of the capacity for receiving and recognising the Word of God is exclusively the work of the Holy Spirit and not that of philosophical arguments.

If evidences extraneous to the Word of God itself are claimed to be sufficient to inform us of its truth, then in point of fact two sources of revelation are set up: one from which we gain the revelation and one by which we are able to know about it. But if we are able to know about it by means of evidences attesting themselves to reason and experience, then knowledge of the Word of God is only a human, rational knowledge exactly on the same plane as our knowledge of physics and biology. Theology becomes a science just like any other science. Given the religious data contained in the Bible, theology can serenely work out its dogmatic propositions, undisturbed by the thought of eternity and the Coming Kingdom of God. We are then actually working, not with two sources and two kinds of revelation, but with a general, impersonal, and timeless revelation which can be known by the natural man. We are then operating with general principles and not with the Word of God. Is the Westminster Confession of Faith not guilty of a pure rationalising of Scripture

and the Word of God?

Our doubts are increased as we come to the last sentence of this Article V. "Yet, notwithstanding, our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth, and divine authority thereof, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts." "Our full persuasion" - then is the knowledge granted us by the Holy Spirit merely relative to what we already know? Does it simply confirm and supplement what we already know? Here the Holy Spirit is not the possibility of knowledge of the Word. Here He is not the Creator Spirit. The Holy Spirit is here represented as helping man. He is represented as performing more perfectly for man the work man was already doing, and indeed, doing well enough not to need the Holy Spirit at all. In this teaching of the Westminster Confession of Faith the Holy Spirit is simply an extension and a heightening of our natural powers, of our categories of cognition. When reason is admitted to have a capacity for revelation, and when the Holy Spirit is regarded as that which raises that capacity to the nth degree, man is not depicted as blind but only partially blind. He is not deaf, he is only hard of hearing. He is not dead, he is merely inconveniently ill. He does not need to be born again,

he only needs to be rejuvenated. Such is not the witness of Scripture.

Theologians who cling to a natural and a revealed revelation usually seek to justify their position upon the first chapter of Romans. Paul unquestionably teaches there that God reveals Himself in nature. But - "their foolish heart was darkened".<sup>1</sup> As a result man in his wisdom - "professing themselves to be wise, they became fools"<sup>2</sup> - is wholly incapable of knowing God in nature and in the works of His creation. Similarly Calvin teaches in the first chapter of his Institutes that there is a natural revelation of God; and then he goes on to demonstrate from Scripture how man lost this knowledge in his sin and fall. Man as an unpardoned, unsanctified sinner cannot know God. "But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."<sup>3</sup>

The decisive phrase in the Barmen Confession's declaration about one source of revelation is this:

1. Romans, 1:21.

2. Romans, 1:22.

3. I Corinthians, 2:14.

"that the Church might and must acknowledge as sources of its proclamation". There may be revelations of God apart from and outside the one Word of God which is Jesus Christ as He is testified to in the Holy Scriptures. But if there is, it can have absolutely no place or influence in the proclamation of the Church. Let the philosophers, the scientists, the historians, the lawyers and the statesmen perform their most valuable and important service. Let them investigate nature and history to the best of their ability, and let them draw the necessary conclusions. In short, let them reap that knowledge of nature and history which, of course, God gives to them. But on no account is this knowledge to be a source of the proclamation of the Church, nor in the slightest degree a norm of its doctrine.

Every one of the old Reformed Confessions of Faith, including the Westminster, is in complete agreement with the Barmen Confession at this point. The Westminster declares in Article III of Chapter I, speaking of the Apocrypha, that it can have no authority in the Church because it is not part of the Canon of Scripture.<sup>1</sup>

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1. "Libri Apocryphi, vulgo dicti, quum non fuerint divinitus inspirati, Canonem Scripturae nullatenus constituunt; proindeque nullam aliam auctoritatem obtinere debent in Ecclesia Dei."

Again in Article VI: "..... unto which (the Scripture) nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men."<sup>1</sup> Much more explicit is the Westminster Confession in Article IX, "The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself,"<sup>2</sup> and in Article X, "The supreme Judge, by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits are to be examined, and in Whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in Scripture."<sup>3</sup> The fact that the

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1. "cui nihil deinceps addendum est, sen novis a spiritu revelationibus, sive traditionibus hominum.
  2. "Infallibilis Scripturam interpretandi regula est Scriptura ipsa."
  3. "Supremus iudex, a quo omnes de religione controversiae sunt determinandae, omnia Conciliorum decreta, opiniones Scriptorum Veterum, doctrinae denique, hominum, et privati quicunque Spiritus sunt examinandi, cujusque sententia tenemur acquiescere, nullus alius esse potest, praeter Spiritum Sanctum in Scriptura pronunciantem.

Westminster Confession did not always keep to this principle itself, but was guilty of employing rational principles in its interpretation of Scripture, and of admitting a natural theology along with a revealed knowledge of God, does not mean that it countenanced a natural theology within the Church. On the contrary, the passages just quoted show only too clearly that the Scriptures and the Scriptures alone were to be the sole source, authority and criterion of the Church's proclamation. The intention of the Westminster Confession is abundantly plain; that it did not entirely live up to its intention in no way justifies a natural theology within the Church nor exonerates us for falling into the same error.<sup>1</sup> The fact that the framers of the Westminster Confession did fall into the error of a natural theology, in spite of their strenuous efforts and

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1. Note. The Westminster Confession, which nowhere claims infallibility for itself, teaches that even the Churches with the best intentions fall into error. In Chap. XXV, Art. V, we read: "The purest Churches under heaven are subject both to mixture and error; and some have so degenerated as to become no Churches of Christ, but synagogues of Satan." A Church which had so degenerated would be a Church which frankly recognised two authorities and two sources of her proclamation - a Church which, by the open admission of two authorities and two sources, had challenged the Lordship of Jesus Christ in His Church and had exalted itself above Him. Such

honest intentions to avoid anything like it, should remind us that all Creeds and Confessions are the word of man and not the Word of God. It should remind us that our "adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour".<sup>1</sup> There is no room for spiritual pride in that we have been able to criticize the Westminster. We are rather warned to take account of our own peril as theologians and to know what we do when we interpret the Scriptures. "Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation".<sup>2</sup> This is our one bulwark against a natural theology. But just because this is our bulwark we dare to obey the command given to the Church, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature".<sup>3</sup>

We have dealt at length with the Westminster Confession concerning the Scriptures as the sole source of the Church's proclamation, because it is most

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a Church is the Church of Rome with its doctrines of the infallibility of the Pope, nature and grace, and faith and reason. And such a Church is modern Protestantism with its manifest avowal of a natural theology in its manifold forms.

1. I Peter, 5:8.
2. Matthew, 26:41.
3. Mark, 16:15.

culpable in teaching a natural theology. But all the Reformed standards are quite as emphatic. The other two Confessions which admitted of two sources of revelation in a restricted sense - the Confessio Gallicana and the Confessio Belgica - are in the strongest possible agreement with the Barmen Declaration in making the Scriptures the sole source of the Church's proclamation. The Confessio Gallicana lays down that inasmuch as the Scriptures are "the rule of all truth, containing all that is necessary for the service of God and for our salvation, it is not lawful for men, nor even for angels, to add to it, to take away from it, or to change it. Whence it follows that no authority, whether of antiquity, or custom, or numbers, or human wisdom, or judgments, or proclamations, or edicts, or decrees, or councils, or visions, or miracles, should be opposed to these Holy Scriptures, but, on the contrary, all things should be examined, regulated, and reformed according to them."<sup>1</sup> The Confessio Belgica insists that "it is unlawful for anyone, though an Apostle, to teach otherwise than we are now taught in the Holy Scriptures: nay though it were an angel from heaven, as the Apostle Paul says. For since it is forbidden to

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1. Art. V.



add unto or take away anything from the Word of God, it doth thereby evidently appear that the doctrine thereof is most perfect and complete in all respects. Neither may we compare any writings of men, though ever so holy, with those divine Scriptures..... for the truth is above all: for all men are of themselves liars, and more vain than vanity itself."<sup>1</sup>

We shall have occasion to examine more of the old Reformed symbols in regard to the Scriptures being the only source of the Church's proclamation when we come to deal with the remaining evangelical truths set forth in the Barmen Confession.

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1. Art. VII.

Section 3:    The Lordship of Jesus Christ.

Article   II.

"As Jesus Christ is God's consolation of the forgiveness of all our sins, so is He also and with equal seriousness, God's mighty claim upon our whole life. Through Him there meets us the joyous liberation from the ungodly fetters of this world into free thankful ministry to His creatures.

"We reject the false doctrine that there are other spheres of our life in which we are to own other lords than Jesus Christ, spheres in which we did not need justification and sanctification through Him."

The second article of faith of the Barmen Confession makes three fundamental assertions:

1. Jesus Christ is the Lord of our whole life.
2. He is the Lord in that He is our justification.
3. He is the Lord in that He is our sanctification.

In the revelation of Jesus Christ as our justification and sanctification, man and his world are revealed in their utmost need. There is described for us man in his state of sin, and man under grace. Man as such and in himself is a sinner in need of forgiveness. Man is in bondage to the ungodly fetters of this world, and hence incapable of serving either God or his fellow-man. He is an abomination in the sight of God. Herein lies the misery and tragedy man. It is moreover characteristic of man to seek deliverance from "this present evil world", to overcome his shame and misery in a faith and

obedience to other lords than Jesus Christ. Man is also prone to underestimate the severity and all-inclusiveness of this judgment upon him, and to imagine that there are some spheres - possibly the religious or political sphere - of his life in which he can find refuge from the curse, spheres in which he can stand as a righteous and holy man, and in which he can obtain peace. Man persuades himself that just in his well-meaning humanitarian or religious service to his fellow-prisoners he can escape the annihilating catastrophe which has overtaken him. Such is the description of fallen man set forth in the Barmen Confession. Man is radically, and seen from his side, irrevocably lost.

The old Reformed standards are one in confessing this knowledge of man disclosed in Jesus Christ. The Heidelberg Catechism teaches that man by nature is prone to hate God and his neighbour,<sup>1</sup> and that God because of man's wilful disobedience, is terribly displeased with our inborn as well as actual sins, and will punish them in just judgment in time and eternity, as he has declared: Cursed is everyone that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the

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1. Ques. 5.

law, to do them.<sup>1</sup> The Confessio Scoticana in its exposition of Genesis teaches the image of God has been utterly defaced in man, and he and his posterity have become enemies to God, slaves to Satan and servants unto sin. Everlasting death has had, and shall have power and dominion over all that have not been, are not, or shall not be regenerate from above.<sup>2</sup> The Helvetica Prior sets forth a doctrine of man and of original sin in Articles VII and VIII. The Confessio Gallicana deals with it at great length in Articles IX, X, XI, XII; similarly the Confessio Belgica in Articles XIV and XV. Chapter VI of the Westminster Confession treats of the Fall of Man, of sin and its consequent punishment.

There are, of course, theological problems raised by the old Confessions in their manner of stating the way in which man fell into sin. These problems, however, are not raised by the Barmen Declaration. It is not concerned with the secondary questions of how man fell but with the fact of his fall, his absolute need of righteousness - a fact disclosed in the revelation of the forgiveness of sins in Jesus Christ. The old Confessions are not always careful to expound

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1. Ques. 10.

2. Confessio Scoticana, see Art. III.

the doctrine of sin in the closest possible connection with the revelation in Jesus Christ, although they all affirm that the man from heaven is our righteousness, our justification, our sanctification and our "only comfort in life and in death".

Jesus Christ is the man in whom God became what we are in order that we might become what He is. We are therefore no longer under the curse, wrath and judgment of God. We are sinners but - pardoned sinners. And therefore we are consoled and at peace with God. We are just and holy, without spot or blemish. No longer haters and enemies of God, we are His children, and have entered upon the glorious liberty of His children. There now emerges the possibility of performing service to God and to His creatures. All this we can only acknowledge as miracle and wonder. We can simply rejoice in the great deeds of God whereby He has translated us from the kingdom of Satan into the Kingdom of righteousness.

And now we come to the decisive thing which the Barmen Confession has to tell us: Jesus Christ manifests Himself as the Lord precisely in forgiving all our sins. Only God can forgive sins. No temporal power or personage can do what God has done for us in His Son. The peculiarity of God's claim upon us is

that He forgives sin, and in forgiving it, removes it entirely from His sight. In order that the man Jesus Christ might become our justification, He had to die to pay the penalty of sin and to take upon Himself our shame, guilt and punishment. "The wages of sin are death." But that death might not have the victory, and for the manifestation of the power of God unto salvation, Jesus Christ rose from the dead to bring our new life to light. Thus in the death and in the resurrection of Jesus Christ He is our justification and sanctification. In dying to our sin and in rising to newness of life He exhibits Himself pre-eminently as the Lord.

The Confessions of the Reformation do not explicitly teach that Jesus Christ manifests Himself as the Lord in forgiving sins, although, to be sure, the work of justification, reconciliation, sanctification and redemption are ascribed to Him and to no other. Calvin in his Catechism propounds the question, "Why callest thou him our Lord? Because He is appointed of the Father to have Lordship over us, and to rule in heaven and earth, and to be the head of men and angels."<sup>1</sup> But when Calvin summarises the content of the sentence from

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1. Ques. 48.

the Apostles' Creed, "and in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord", he writes: "It is to acknowledge the Son of God to be our Saviour, and to understand the means whereby He has redeemed us from death, and purchased life unto us".<sup>1</sup> The Heidelberg Catechism comes much nearer the teaching of the Barmen Confession. Question 34 puts the same question, "Why callest thou him our Lord?" and answers it as follows: "Because, not with silver and gold, but with his precious blood, he has redeemed and purchased us, body and soul, from sin and from all the power of the devil, to be his own."

It is important to note that the Barmen Confession in its damnamus rejects the false doctrine that there are spheres or lords which do not require justification and sanctification. The judgment and the grace which befall the world in Jesus Christ is as valid for the "Christian" as it is for the man outside the Church. The State and all secular activity stand under the same need and promise as the Church. Jesus Christ is not merely the adopted Lord of a religious society - a pious idea; He is the Lord of heaven and earth.

In this article the Barmen Confession appears to teach that justification consists in the forgiveness of sins and that sanctification is the possibility of free, thankful ministry to God's creatures, i.e., the

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1. Ques. 31.

possibility of the Church, the communion of saints. But we do not believe that we are warranted in deriving doctrines of justification and sanctification from the passage under consideration. Certain of the old Confessions dealt with these doctrines at considerable length. The Confessio Belgica devotes Articles XXIII and XXIV to an exposition of them. The Westminster Confession treats of justification in Chapter XI, of adoption in Chapter XII, and of sanctification in Chapter XIII.

Section 4: Jesus Christ the Lord of the Church.

Article III.

"The Christian Church is the community of brethren in which Jesus Christ acts presently as the Lord in Word and Sacrament through the Holy Spirit. As the Church of pardoned sinners, she has to testify in the midst of a world of sin with her faith as with her obedience, with her message as with her order, that she is solely His property, that she lives and desires to live solely by His consolation and by His direction in the expectation of His appearance.

"We reject the false doctrine that the Church is permitted to abandon the form of her message and her order at her own pleasure or to changes in the prevailing world-views and political convictions."

The first three articles of the Barmen Confession speak explicitly of Jesus Christ. In its description of Jesus Christ we can perceive a logical development. The first two articles tell what He is; the third tells



us what He does. Jesus Christ is the one Word of God and Jesus Christ is the Lord. He exhibits Himself pre-eminently as the Lord in His unique work of justification and sanctification. The Barmen Confession now moves naturally to a discussion of how He acts, i.e., how He performs His gracious work of justification and sanctification. Jesus Christ acts presently as the Lord in Word and Sacrament through the Holy Spirit. Thus the Christian Church is the community of brethren in which Jesus Christ performs His Merciful work of sanctification and justification. The Church is the place and the community of the just and the sanctified in the event of Jesus Christ. The Church is the community of pardoned sinners. This is the first general point which the third article of the Barmen Confession makes; the second is that the Church bears witness to the unique work which Jesus Christ as the Lord performs upon her in her faith and obedience towards Him, in maintaining - to use the language of the Reformers - the pure preaching of the Word, the right administration of the Sacraments and proper ecclesiastical discipline. The Church is commanded to bear witness to that event in which she has been bought with a price. The Church confesses that she belongs wholly to Jesus Christ. He rules her through the Scriptures. (We recall here

Article I of our Confession.) The Church's message and her form is determined solely by Jesus Christ as He is testified to in Holy Scripture. Neither the Church herself, nor powers and authorities outside the Church, can be normative.

The third article of the Barmen Confession may be comprehended in five propositions:

1. Jesus Christ is the Lord of the Church.
2. The Church testifies that Jesus Christ is her Lord.
3. Jesus Christ acts presently as the Lord in Word and Sacrament through the Holy Spirit.
4. The Church testifies to this event in her faith in it and in obedient proclamation of the Word and the right administration of the Sacraments, i.e. in subjecting her message and order to Jesus Christ.
5. The Church awaits the appearance of Jesus Christ.

The Church's witness to the event in which Jesus Christ is the Lord and the event itself are insolubly and incomprehensibly linked together in one. Jesus Christ, the Head, and the Church, His body, are not divided; secondly, there can be no justification nor sanctification outside the Church and the Church alone can bear witness to this work of justification and sanctification. For the Church testifies<sup>to</sup>/Him in the midst of a world of sin.

We turn now to an examination of the Confessional

standards of the Reformed Church. Generally speaking, the old symbols prefer to speak of Jesus Christ as the only Head of the Church.<sup>1</sup> When, however, they refer to Jesus Christ as the Head they mean that He is the Lord of the Church, because His person and authority is confessed while rejecting that of the Pope. Jesus Christ is also usually spoken of as the Head in relation to the Church as His body. This at once signifies the unity of Christ with His Church, and the control of the members by the Head. The Helvetica Posterior teaches that the Church is the "body of Christ, because the believers are living members of Christ under Him the Head."<sup>2</sup>

The old Confessions agree with the Barmen Declaration in its assertion that the Church testifies to the

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1. See the Theses Bermensis, Art. I; the Helvetica Prior, Art. XVIII; the Helvetica Posterior, Chap. XVII, Art. 2, 5; the Heidelberg Catechism, Ques. 49, 50, 51; Calvin's Catechism, Ques. 97; the Confessio Gallicana, Art. XXX; the Confessio Belgica, Art. XXIX, XXXI; the Confessio Scotica, Art. XI, XVI; the Westminster Confession, Chap. XXV, Art. VI.
  2. Chap. XVII, Art. 5, "vocatur item Corpus Christi, quia fideles sunt viva Christi membra, sub capiti Christo".

Lordship of Jesus Christ by her faith and obedience, and by the submission of her message and form to His direction. But the Confessions of the 16th century usually do so by distinguishing between the true and false Church. The Confessio Belgica sets forth the marks of the true and false Church as follows: "If the pure doctrine of the Gospel is preached therein; if she maintains the pure administration of the Sacraments as instituted by Christ; if Church discipline is exercised in punishing sin; in short, if all things are managed according to the pure Word of God, all things contrary thereto rejected, and Jesus Christ acknowledged as the only Head of the Church..... The false Church ascribes more power and authority to herself and her ordinances than to the Word of God, and will not submit herself to the yoke of Christ."<sup>1</sup> "The true Church must be governed by the spiritual policy which our Lord has taught in His Word."<sup>2</sup> The Confessio Scoticana emphasises the need of discerning the true Church from the false and details the notes of the true Church.<sup>3</sup> The Scriptures are decisive for the settlement of controversy and for the reformation of the

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1. Art. XXIX.

2. Art. XXX.

3. Art. XVIII.

Church.<sup>1</sup> No articles repugnant to Scripture are to be countenanced.<sup>2</sup> Where the old Confessions do not make clear the distinction between the true and false Church, they are one in confessing that the Church knows only the authority of the Word of God in Scripture. The Theses Bernensis may be taken as expressing the protest of them all. "Jesus Christ is the only Head of the holy, Christian Church, which is born of the Word of God, remains in the same and hears not the voice of a stranger."<sup>3</sup> "The Church of Christ does not make laws and commandments without God's Word. Consequently all human propositions, which one calls Church laws, which are not grounded and commanded in God's Word are no longer binding upon us."<sup>4</sup>

It is interesting to note that the Barmen Confession speaks of faith and obedience to Jesus Christ. Usually, although not always, the old Reformers spoke of obedience to the Word of God or to Scripture. The Barmen Confession, moreover, emphasises the capacity of the Church as witness.

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1. Art. XVIII.

2. Art. XX.

3. Art. I.

4. Art. II.

The Christian Church is the community of brethren in which Jesus Christ acts presently as the Lord. The presence of Jesus Christ in His Church is implied in all those Confessions which we enumerated which referred to Him as the Head and the Church as His body. His presence is His work of justification and sanctification. In his Catechism Calvin puts the question, "Is it necessary to believe the article, the Holy Catholic Church?" and answers: "Yes, unless we might make Christ's death of none effect, and make all these things to no purpose which we have rehearsed already: for all Christ's doings prove there is a Church."<sup>1</sup> Having dealt with the Church, Calvin, in following out his exposition of the Apostles' Creed, goes on to the questions concerning the remission of sins. And then he puts the question, "Wherefore dost thou make mention of the remission of sins, immediately after thou hast spoken of the Church?" Answer: "Because that no man can receive forgiveness of his sins unless he be joined in the fellowship of God's people, and so continue in the unity of Christ's body even to the end, like a true member of His Church."<sup>2</sup> The Confessio Belgica confesses

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1. Ques. 94.

2. Ques. 104.

that there is no salvation outside of the Church,<sup>1</sup> while the Confessio Gallicana, putting the matter somewhat differently, declares that "We enjoy Christ only through the Gospel"<sup>2</sup> and that "there can be no Church where the Word of God is not received, nor profession made of subjection to it, nor use of the Sacraments".<sup>3</sup> The Westminster Confession says that the visible Church is the Kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation.<sup>4</sup>

Here let us note that the Barmen Confession does not introduce the distinction between the visible and the invisible Church which is to be found in several of the documents of the Reformation. It speaks very concretely of the visible Church: "the community of brethren", "word and Sacrament".

The Christian Church is the community of brethren in which Jesus Christ acts presently as the Lord in Word and Sacrament through the Holy Spirit. We come now to a consideration of how Jesus Christ is present in the Church, how He performs the work of justification

1. Art. XXVIII.

2. Art. XXV.

3. Art. XXVIII.

4. Chap. XXV, Art. II.

and sanctification. He is present in the Church in the event of the Church's proclamation through the Holy Spirit. Under the Church's proclamation are comprehended the preaching of the Word and the observance of the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. How do the old Reformed Confessions conceive of the presence of Jesus Christ in the sermon? How do they represent the presence of Jesus Christ in the Sacraments? The Barmen Confession teaches that it is an event, an event in which Jesus Christ manifests Himself as the Lord, as the One who forgives sin. In the passages just quoted from the old symbols in regard to Christ's presence in the Church, no care was taken to describe it as an event. It was rather represented as being a static relationship. But we must now examine more closely the articles dealing with the preaching of the Word of God and the Sacraments.

Calvin is very clear when he identifies the act of preaching with the act of Jesus Christ. "Is it then a thing necessary to have pastors and ministers in the Church? Yea, very necessary; and at their mouths men are bound to receive the Word of the Lord with all humble obedience; so that whosoever doth set light of them, and regardeth not to hear their sayings, they contemne also Jesus Christ and divide themselves from the



fellowship of his flock."<sup>1</sup> The Heidelberg Catechism discusses preaching under the general subject of the Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven whereby Heaven is opened to them that believe and shut against unbelievers.<sup>2</sup>

"How is the Kingdom of Heaven opened and shut by the preaching of the holy Gospel? In this way: that, according to the command of Christ, it is proclaimed and openly witnessed to believers, one and all, that as often as they accept with true faith the promise of the Gospel, all of their sins are really forgiven them of God for the sake of Christ's merits; and on the contrary, to all unbelievers and hypocrites, that the wrath of God and eternal condemnation abide on them so long as they are not converted: according to which witness of the Gospel will be the judgment of God, both in this life and in that which is to come."<sup>3</sup> The Heidelberg Catechism, to be sure, does not speak of Christ acting presently in the preaching of the Gospel as Calvin does, but it does teach that in the event of preaching sins are forgiven. Preaching, then, is the event of judgment and grace. To believers it is the proclamation of the forgiveness of sins; to such as do not believe

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1. Ques. 307. Cf. also Ques. 345.

2. Ques. 83.

3. Ques. 84.

it is rejection and condemnation. It is in this light that Reformed Church theology understands the text, "And I will give unto thee the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven".<sup>1</sup> The Christian minister himself does not pronounce judgment on men, nor grants to some absolution. He proclaims the Word of God, the Gospel of the forgiveness of sins; and the proclamation of the Word is judgment to such as do not believe, grace to such as do believe. Inasmuch, however, as proclamation is an act of men, their words are decisive for those who hear. It is a terrible thing that we men do when we preach God's Word; it is a fearful power which God has delivered to the true Church!

Strangely enough, the Reformed Confessions are not so much concerned with the problem of Christ's presence in preaching, i.e. in the word of man, as they were with the problem of our Lord's presence in the sacraments, especially in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. The Barmen Confession wisely avoids the issues which divided the Lutheran and Reformed Churches in Germany

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1. Matthew 16:19; Cf. Matthew 18:18.

by describing the presence of Jesus Christ in the sermon and in the Sacrament as an event. It is to be borne in mind that Lutherans, Reformed and United Churchmen subscribed to the Barmen articles. As this article now stands, the way is left open for a healing of the breach between the two communions, and also for a new understanding of the Lord's Supper itself. The greatness of the Barmen Confession is manifested not only in what it declares but also in its silence upon controversial points. The time has not yet come when the Church is fully ready to grapple with these problems. God in His wisdom does not always give to His Church full understanding of His truth at once. Possibly long and earnest theological study, and much tribulation awaits the Church in Germany before she can be one in her witness to God's presence in Jesus Christ in the Supper. And how long must the Church of Scotland wait until there is a new profound and general appreciation of this Sacrament? How long?

We have now to see how the symbols of our Church speak of the presence of Jesus Christ in the Sacraments. In this study we confine ourselves to Calvin's Catechism, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Confessio Scoticana and the Westminster Confession.

Before we can properly understand the teaching of

the Reformed Fathers on the Sacraments we must realise the errors of Rome which they were combating. Rome taught, and still teaches, that in the Supper the sacrifice of Jesus Christ is repeated and that the elements are changed into the body and blood of Jesus Christ. Against these two heresies the Reformed Confessions are directed. They insisted that "we have full forgiveness of all our sins by the one sacrifice of Jesus Christ, which He Himself has once accomplished on the cross".<sup>1</sup> They were equally insistent upon the rejection of the false doctrine of transubstantiation. They loathed the idea of a miraculous, or rather magical transformation of the wine and bread into the blood and body of our Lord. They were intent upon preserving the paradox, the hiddenness and the indirectness of Christ's presence in the elements. They wished to distinguish between Christ Jesus in His eternal substance and the elements, precisely in their union in the Sacrament. In order to do this the Reformed Fathers predominantly described the Sacraments as signs, as tokens, and seals "representing", "exhibiting",

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1. Heidelberg Catechism, Ques. 80; Cf. the Westminster Confession, Chap. XXIX, Art. II and the Confessio Scoticana, Art. XXII.

"teaching", "confirming", "granting fuller assurance"  
 of what had been done once and for all in the life,  
 death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.<sup>1</sup> In describing

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1. Calvin in answer to Ques. 310 in his Catechism, What is a Sacrament? writes: "A Sacrament is an outward token, which by a visible sign, doth represent unto us spiritual things, to the end that God's promises might take the more deep root in our hearts, and that we might so much the more surely give credit unto them". Calvin reiterates this definition of a sacrament in his answer to Ques. 312: "Since it is the proper office of God's Holy Spirit, to seal and print the promises of God in our hearts, how canst thou attribute or give this property unto the Sacraments? There is a great difference between the one and the other; for God's Spirit is He alone, Who in very deed is able to touch and move our hearts, to illuminate our minds, and to assure our consciences, in such sort that all these ought to be accounted His only works, so that the whole praise and glory hereof ought to be given unto Him only: notwithstanding it both pleased our Lord to use His Sacraments as second instruments thereof, according as it seemed good unto Him, without diminishing any point of the virtue of His spirit." The Heidelberg Catechism in replying to the question, What are the Sacraments? (Ques. 66) states: "The Sacraments are visible holy signs and seals, appointed of God for this end, that by the use thereof He may the more fully declare and seal to us the promise of the Gospel, namely, that He grants us out of free grace the forgiveness of sins and everlasting life, for the sake of the one sacrifice of Christ accomplished on the cross." The Confessio Scoticana tells us that the purpose of the Sacraments is twofold, namely, visibly to distinguish between the Church and those outside the Church, and to seal in our hearts the assurance of His promise of that most blessed conjunction, union and society which the elect have with their Head, Christ Jesus (See Art. XXI). The Westminster

the Sacrament predominantly and primarily as signs, they left themselves open to the error of denying a real presence of Jesus Christ in the Supper altogether - an error which the Fathers themselves foresaw and did their best to rectify, as we shall see presently. The fact is the authors of our Confessions did not consistently see the Sacrament as an event, as an act of Jesus Christ, as revelation. If the Reformers had steadfastly kept in mind Church proclamation as revelation in which God gives Himself to man in His freedom through the Holy Spirit, they would not have become involved in difficulties. The Barmen Confession surmounts these difficulties when it describes the Church and her proclamation in terms of an act of God in Jesus Christ.

In certain passages in his Catechism, Calvin seems to deny the presence of Jesus Christ altogether. For instance, he asks: "Then His body is not presently included in the bread, nor His blood contained in the cup? No, but clean contrariwise: if we will have the substance of the Sacrament, we must lift up our hearts

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Confession teaches: "Sacraments are holy signs and seals of the covenant of grace, immediately instituted by God, to represent Christ and His benefits, and to confirm our interest in Him: as also to put a visible difference between those that belong unto the Church and the rest of the world; and solemnly to engage them to the service of God in Christ according to His Word" (Chap. XXVII, Art. I).

into heaven where our Saviour Christ is in the glory of His Father, from whence we have the sure hope, that He will come for our redemption; and therefore we may not search Him in these corruptible elements."<sup>1</sup> Is there not in these words a trace of symbolism? Of Platonic philosophy? If the Sacrament is the place where Christ acts, ought we not rather to look to the elements in faith and precisely there to find Christ? The Heidelberg Catechism wrestles with the same problem. Question 72 reads as follows: "Is, then, the outward washing of water itself the washing away of sins? No; for only the blood of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit cleanse us from all sin." If the authors of the Heidelberg Catechism had viewed the Sacrament of Baptism as revelation, they might have answered that the water does wash away sins inasmuch as the blood of Jesus Christ is in the water, incomprehensibly united with it.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Ques. 355.

2. In this way Luther answers the question in his Small Catechism. "How can water do such great things? It is not water, indeed, that does it, but the Word of God which is with and in the water, and faith which trusts in the Word of God in the water. For without the Word of God the water is nothing but water, and no baptism; but with the Word of God it is a baptism - that is, a gracious water of life and a washing of regeneration in the Holy Ghost, as St. Paul says, Titus 3:5-7."

However, the Heidelberg answers it in these words:

"God speaks thus not without great cause: namely, not only to teach us thereby that like as the filthiness of the body is taken away by water, so our sins also are taken away by the blood and Spirit of Christ; but much more, that by this divine pledge and token He may assure us that we are as really washed from our sins spiritually as our bodies are washed with water." In this answer Christ is not said to be present. No event is spoken of. No revelation occurs. Instead, the event is separated from the sign. The contemporaneousness of Christ is not asserted.<sup>1</sup> The Catechism speaks of the Sacraments as being pledges, assurances, instruction,

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1. The Heidelberg repeats this view of the Sacraments when it treats of the Lord's Supper. "Why, then, doth Christ call the bread His body, and the cup His blood, or the New Testament in His blood; and St. Paul, the communion of the body and blood of Christ? Christ speaks thus not without great cause, namely, not only to teach us thereby that like as bread and wine sustain this temporal life, so also His crucified body and shed blood are the true meat and drink of our souls unto life eternal; but much more, by this visible sign and pledge to assure us that we are as really partakers of His true body and blood through the working of the Holy Ghost, as we receive these holy tokens in remembrance of Him; and that all His sufferings and obedience are as certainly our own as if we had ourselves suffered and done all in our own persons" (Ques. 79).



memorials of a past event; it does not speak of sanctification and justification taking place in the twofold appropriation of Christ's body and blood and the bread and wine.

Of course, the Reformed Fathers were challenged on this very point, especially by their Lutheran brethren. They were accused of reducing the Sacraments to bare signs. As is well known, Zwingli represented the position of the extreme Reformed Churchmen. Calvin endeavoured to mediate between Zwingli and Luther.<sup>1</sup> If we return to his Catechism we shall see how he never

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1. Luther's contention for the real presence of Christ's body in the elements is strongly grounded on Scripture. But when he fortified his position by arguments taken from the metaphysics of the Scholastics, he left himself open to serious criticism. The controversy between the Zwinglians and the Lutherans is set forth in the Formula of Concord. It is not our task to enter into the various controversies which raged during the 16th century around such terms as "ubiquity", "communicatio idiomatum", consubstantiation", and "kenoticism". It is of value, however, to observe in passing that the Lutheran symbols also do not conceive the Sacraments in the light of an event, but as a state.

wished to conceive the Sacraments as signs separated from the body and blood of our Lord. "Dost thou mean that we must be indeed partakers of the body and blood of the Lord? I mean so, for since the whole trust and assurance of our salvation doth consist in the obedience which He hath performed unto God His Father (in that, that God doth accept and take it as it were ours) we must first possess Him, seeing that His benefits do not belong unto us, until He has first given Himself unto us."<sup>1</sup>

The phrase "until He has first given Himself unto us" is decisive. Calvin undoubtedly means what the Barmen Confession says when it asserts that Jesus Christ acts presently in Word and Sacrament. Of all Reformed Church standards, the Confessio Scoticana most strongly urges a real appropriation of the body and blood of Jesus Christ. "And this we utterlie damne the vanity of they that affirme Sacramentes to be nathing ellis bot naked and baire signs. No, wee assuredlie beleve that be Baptisme we are ingrafted in Christ Jesus, to be made partakers of His justice, be quhilk our sinnes ar covered and remitted. And alswa, that in the Supper richtlie used, Christ Jesus is so joined with us, that hee becummis very nourishment and fude of our saules.

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1. Ques. 342.

..... So that we confesse, and undoubtedlie beleewe, that the faithfull, in the richt use of the Lord's Table, do so eat the bodie and drinke the blude of the Lord Jesus, that He remaines in them, and they in Him: Zea, they are so made flesh of His flesh and bone of His bones."<sup>1</sup>

It will be observed that the Barmen Confession does not do away with the idea of the Sacrament as a sign. Inasmuch as the Sacrament is a human, temporal ordinance the Church bears witness to the event which takes place in it. And she testifies with her faith in this event. Faith is the human correlate of the divine Holy Spirit. Without the working of the Holy Spirit with the Son there can be no Sacrament, just as it is impossible to receive Christ Jesus without faith. On this point all the Reformed Confessions are quite clear.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Art. XXI.

2. See Calvin's Catechism, Ques. 312, 317, 319. Calvin teaches that not only is faith necessary to receive the Sacrament but that the Sacraments serve the purpose of nourishing our faith. Heidelberg Catechism, Ques. 65, 67, 70, 72, 73, 74, 79, 80, 81. Confessio Scoticana, Art. XXI, XXII. The Westminster Confession, Chap. XXVII, Art. III; Chap. XXVIII, Art. VI, VII.

We now come to the most difficult problem connected with the presence of Jesus Christ in the Sacraments. The difficulty is presented by the Barmen Confession when it declares that the Church waits for the appearance of her Lord. The Church exists in the world in the time between the Ascension of Jesus Christ and His Coming again. The Church is the Kingdom of Jesus Christ; it is not yet the Kingdom of God. When the Kingdom of God comes in power and glory, the Church will be no more. The present is the regnum gratiae; the future is the regnum gloriae. We live in time which is not yet eternity.<sup>1</sup>

If Jesus Christ has ascended into heaven and now sitteth at the right hand of God the Father and the Church awaits His return, is the Church left alone with herself? Is Jesus Christ absent from His Church? Or if He is present with His Church, how is He present, if He is to come again? The Heidelberg Catechism answers these questions in the following manner: "How dost thou understand the words, He ascended into Heaven? That Christ, in sight of His disciples, was taken up from the earth into heaven, and in our behalf there

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1. Cf. Barth's Credo, English Transl. p. 148; Dogmatics, pp. 164-167.

continues, until He shall come again to judge the living and the dead."<sup>1</sup> "Is not, then, Christ with us even unto the end of the world, as He has promised? Christ is true man and true God: according to His human nature, He is not now upon earth; but according to His Godhead, majesty, grace and Spirit, He is at no time absent from us."<sup>2</sup> "But are not, in this way," continues the Catechism, "the two natures in Christ separated from one another, if the manhood be not wherever the Godhead is? By no means, for since the Godhead is incomprehensible and everywhere present, it must follow that it is indeed beyond the bounds of the manhood which it has assumed, but is yet none the less in the same also, and remains personally united to it."<sup>3</sup> This last answer, incorporating as it does the doctrine of ubiquity, is not altogether satisfactory. Calvin's thought is quite similar. He writes: "But is our Saviour Christ so ascended into heaven, that He is no more here with us? No, not so; for He Himself promiseth contrary, that is, that He will be present with us unto the world's end."<sup>4</sup>

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1. Ques. 46.

2. Ques. 47.

3. Ques. 48.

4. Ques. 78.

"Is it meant of His bodily presence that He maketh promise so to continue with us? No verily, for it is another matter to speak of His body, which was taken up into heaven, and of His power which is spread abroad throughout the whole world."<sup>1</sup>

Calvin does not regard Christ's session at the right hand of God the Father in heaven as a place. It is rather a signification of Christ's exaltation and risen power. "Declare the meaning of this sentence, He sitteth at the right hand of God the Father. The understanding of that is, that He hath received into His hands the government of heaven and earth, whereby He is King and ruler over all."<sup>2</sup> As Barth rightly teaches, Christ's "session at the right hand of God" is to be understood as an explanation of His resurrection from the dead.<sup>3</sup> It speaks not of a definite place but of a definite function and power. "In so far as Jesus Christ is God Himself, neither in His incarnation as such nor in His passion and death did He cease even for a moment to sit 'at the right hand of God the Father'."<sup>4</sup>

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1. Ques. 79.

2. Ques. 80.

3. Credo, p. 105 f.

4. Ibid. p. 107.

In His life and death, in the flesh, the power and the glory of Christ's Godhead was hidden; in the "raising" of Christ in His resurrection from the dead He is now manifest in His supreme sovereignty.<sup>1</sup>

"But the Ascension can and must be regarded from still another point of view, and thereby what is peculiar to it becomes visible. It was Calvin who laid special stress on this other point of view. For he saw in the Ascension not only the crowning conclusion, but above all the end of these appearances of the Risen One. Therefore, in strange contrast to the promise, "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world" (Matt. 28:20), he saw the fulfilment of the word, 'But Me ye have not always' (Matt. 26:2). God's revelation having taken place once and for all in Christ, the Ascension makes a separation, a distance between Him and His disciples, between Him and the world generally. Ended is the time of His direct, His 'worldly' presence in the world, to which the forty days unmistakably belonged; There dawns - one could also say, there returns, the time of the Church. In that time, too, we can speak of His presence in the world, the world which has already been overcome by the mighty saving act of His

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1. Ibid. p. 108.

Cross and in which He has once and for all shown Himself as conqueror. But it is His presence in a world, with which God still has patience, to which He therefore allows time, a temporal future, room for knowledge of His having overcome it, room for faith in the mighty saving act of the Cross revealed in the resurrection. This time is therefore and to that extent a time of His very real but also very indirect presence. As Calvin and the Heidelberg Catechism, Questions 47 and 48, and all Reformed theology have rightly taught, it is the time in which Jesus Christ is present as God and man, to the world and to the Church, only through the Holy Ghost in the witnesses to and in the attestation of His revelation, in which His Kingdom therefore is a divinely real, but, as already stated, a spiritual Kingdom."1 "The beginning of this time..... is the Ascension."2

In the light of the exposition given above we are to understand the Barmen Confession when it affirms that the Church is the community of brethren in which Jesus Christ acts presently in Word and Sacrament through the Holy Spirit. Jesus Christ is the one Word of God and

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1. Ibid. 113.

2. Ibid. 116.



the Church has Jesus Christ in the event of real proclamation of the Word, of "derivative proclamation, related to the words of the prophets and apostles and regulated by them."<sup>1</sup>

The emphasis of the Barmen Confession upon Jesus Christ acting presently is a bulwark against Rome. For according to Rome's interpretation of Christ's Ascension and the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost, Jesus Christ bequeathed His power and authority wholly to the Church and gave His Spirit to the Church unreservedly. In this way the Church comes to possess God, His power and authority, in herself. She becomes self-sufficient and free of any critical reference to eternity. As Barth has commented, in this interpretation "God has abdicated", and surrendered His rule to another.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, in describing Church proclamation as an event the Barmen Confession is at once a defence against a transcendentalism and an immanentism.

One further point needs to be noted before we quit our study of the third article of the Barmen Confession. It brings together the Word and the Sacrament in the

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1. Dogmatics, p. 164.

2. See Kirche und Theologie, in die Theologie und die Kirche, pp. 302-328, for a full discussion of this question.

closest possible relationship. Here the Reformers confirm the position of Barmen, although in practice and in the history of the Reformed Church the rule has not always been observed. Barth is convinced that there is a connection between the neglect of the Sacrament and Protestantism's becoming modernist.<sup>1</sup> Calvin tells us that "God hath joined the Sacraments with the preaching of His Word".<sup>2</sup> Similarly the Heidelberg Catechism confesses that the Holy Ghost works in our hearts by the preaching of the holy Gospel, and confirms it by the use of the Holy Sacraments.<sup>3</sup> The

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1. Credo, p. 200.

2. Calvin's Catechism, Ques. 309. In Section 48 of A Short Treatise on the Lord's Supper (See Vol. II, Calvin's Tracts, English Transl., 1849) we read: "The principal thing recommended by our Lord is to celebrate the ordinance with true understanding. From this it follows that the essential part lies in the doctrine. This being taken away, it is only a frigid, unavailing ceremony..... the sacraments derive their value from the word when it is preached intelligently. Without this they deserve not the name of sacraments." Cf. Mutual Consent of the Churches of Zurich and Geneva as to the Sacraments; Tracts, Vol. II, p. 225, 227 f.: also the Institutes, Bk. IV, Chap. XIV, Secs. 4, 5).

3. Ques. 65.

Confessio Scoticana insists that the Word must accompany the Sacrament in order that it be rightly understood. The Scottish document, however, refers to the words of institution and not to the sermon. Likewise the Westminster document informs us that the grace which is exhibited in or by the sacraments depends "upon the work of the Spirit, and the word of institution, which contains, together with a precept authorising the use thereof, a promise of benefit to worthy receivers".<sup>1</sup>

Barth contends that the Sacrament ought never to have been isolated from the sermon as has been done in the Evangelical Church. "It should be obligatory for the Holy Communion to be celebrated at every service, which is, as is well known, what Calvin strove for."<sup>2</sup>

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1. Chap. XXVII, Art. III.

2. Calvin is said to have yielded to the Geneva authorities on this point. I am told that Barth does not understand why Calvin did not make an issue of it, and insist that the Supper be observed whenever Christians gathered to worship God. In Vol. II of the Tracts, op. cit. we find Calvin writing: "If we duly consider the end which our Lord has in view, we shall perceive that the use should be more frequent than many make it: for the more infirmity presses, the more necessary is it frequently to have recourse to what may and will serve to confirm our faith, and advance us in purity of life; and therefore the practice of all well ordered Churches should be to celebrate the Supper frequently so far as the capacity of the people will admit. And each individual in his own place should prepare himself

To be complete, an evangelical service should have to begin with Baptism, follow that up with the sermon and conclude with the Holy Communion. Then all these 'liturgical movements' would be superfluous!." <sup>1</sup>

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to receive whenever it is administered in the holy assembly, provided there is not some great impediment which constrains him to abstain. Although we have no express commandment signifying the time and the day, it should suffice us to know the intention of our Lord to be, that we should use it often, if we would fully experience the benefit which accrues from it."

1. Credo, p. 200. Note: During the course of a conversation with Professor Barth on the subject of the order of an evangelical Church service, I put to him the possibly seemingly foolish question, "What would you put in the place of Baptism when there are no children to baptize?" His reply was that the question was purely a technical one. He had had in mind only the importance of linking together the sermon and sacrament. Possibly the recitation of the Apostles' Creed could be substituted. Barth believes that the Church service ought not to be rigid and bound by rules, but free and capable of alteration. The order of Baptism, sermon, and Supper is significant. Baptism marks our initiation into the Kingdom of Jesus Christ, the sermon the Light of the Word which guides the pilgrims through the world and the Supper the signpost to Jesus Christ "till He comes". Thus the whole worship of God is made a remarkable witness to the unique character of the life of the Church in the "waiting time".

Section 5: The Ministry of the Church.

Article IV.

"The different offices in the Church do not establish a dominion of some over the others, but on the contrary, the exercise of the ministry is entrusted and enjoined upon the whole congregation.

"We reject the false doctrine that the Church, apart from this ministry, might or ought to give herself, or allow to be given her, special leaders equipped with ruling powers."

A superficial reading of the fourth article of the Barmen Declaration might lead to the conclusion that the Church is a democracy. And indeed it has often been urged that the distinctive mark of the Reformed Church has been its democratic character. The election of ministers and elders by the whole congregation is said to distinguish the Reformed Church from the Roman and Episcopalian communions. The truth is, however, that the Reformed Church is not a democracy but a monarchy in the strictest sense of the word. The Scriptures expressly speak of the Kingdom of God, the Kingdom of Jesus Christ. The Church ought never to forget the superscription on the Cross: "THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS". The principle inherent in a democracy is that the body corporate rules itself. This principle is abhorrent to the very nature of the Church. The Church is ruled exclusively by one man - Christ

Jesus her King. The Church denies the Kingship of Jesus Christ when she allows herself to be regarded as a democracy. We have already learned in Articles II and III that Jesus Christ is the Lord of the Church and exercises His Lordship presently in the Church. Nor is the case such that this Lordship is spiritual (as opposed to the material) and hence invisible. Nothing could be more visible than the manifestation of the monarchical rule of Jesus Christ in sermon and sacrament, in the entire ordering of the form of the Church to His commandments, and in the complete submission of all His subjects to His sovereign rule. A Church which regarded herself - and permitted others to regard her - as a democracy would be a Church which had driven her King from His throne and had usurped His power and authority. The equality of all ministers, elders and laymen in the Church is a sign not of her democratic government but of the absolute subjection of her members to the one Dictator, Lord, King and Emperor of the Church. The dictatorship of Adolph Hitler and the German totalitarian State much more figures the nature of the Church than the "government of the people, by the people and for the people" of the United States of America or Britain's pseudo-monarchy. Not that we are seeking to justify a political dictatorship - not at

all! (The Church will do well if she refuses to identify herself with any political theory, be it democratic or dictatorial.) We would merely emphasise the fact that the Church is not a democracy!

As a matter of fact democracy is no safeguard against the error condemned by the Barmen Confession, namely, that the Church might or ought to give herself special leaders equipped with ruling powers. It is quite possible, for instance, for the American Republic by democratic election to invest President Roosevelt with special, temporary ruling powers. It is quite impossible for the Church to follow this precedent.<sup>1</sup>

In the Reformed Church Jesus Christ calls and appoints certain men to serve Him in His kingdom. Jesus Christ does this in the community of brethren by

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1. The conception of the Church as a democratic institution is in line with the ideas of freedom of thought and conscience which have been described as the triumph of the Reformation over the intellectual tyranny of Rome. See Chap. II p. 102 of this work. The Protestant Church cannot successfully contend with Rome on the ground of the superior excellence of a democratic government. Even the offices of a Pope and bishops are not incompatible with the Reformed position. These offices are only intolerable when those occupying them are not responsible to the whole Church and to the Word of God. See the Dogmatics, p. 108 F.

Word and Sacrament through the Holy Spirit. In the gracious miracle of Church proclamation men encounter Jesus Christ, and are claimed by Him. They become His "slaves" as St. Paul teaches - ministers and servants of the Word. Concretely they become servants to the Scriptures! They do not become critics, judges or masters of the Word of God. On the contrary, they are judged as unprofitable servants by the Scriptures, precisely when they have done all. Just because of this judgment there can be no dominion of some over others in the Church, and no one equipped with special ruling powers. In the Church the Word of God is the sole Ruler. In the Church there are to be found servants - servants of the Word and so servants of the others in the Church.<sup>1</sup> The glory of the minister is just that he is given the gracious privilege to serve, and to serve not according to his own conceptions of service and duty but according to commandments given by the King in His Word. The first point, then, which the Barmen Confession makes in this article is that all members of the Church are subjects of the one King Jesus Christ. When the Confessional Church in Germany framed this doctrine they had in mind, of course, the

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1. Cf. The Book of Common Order, Chap. I, Art. II.  
The Second Book of Discipline, Chap. I, Art. 8.



appointment by the State of a Reich Church bishop and the appointment by the "German Christians" of a Church Board of Administration.

The Barmen Confession merely affirms a doctrine laid down in the historic standards of the Reformed Church. Throughout these documents the phrases "ministers of the Word" and "servants of the Word" resound. They were aimed at the Roman hierarchy and the doctrine of the infallibility of the Pope. The Scottish Confession tells us that the Sacraments can only be rightly administered by lawful ministers, i.e. those who have been appointed to the preaching of the Word into whose mouths God has put some sermon of exhortation.<sup>1</sup> The Confessio Gallicana confesses: "We believe that all true pastors, wherever they may be have the same authority and equal power under one head, one only sovereign and universal bishop, Jesus Christ; and consequently no Church shall claim any authority or dominion over any other."<sup>2</sup>

The second point which the Barmen Confession makes in its fourth article is that the ministry is entrusted and enjoined upon the whole congregation. This truth

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1. Art. XXII.

2. Art. XXX. The Confessio Belgica repeats this truth in practically the same words. Cf. Art. XXXI.

follows from the fact that God acts in Jesus Christ only in the Church. The Church is His body to which the members belong. It is impossible for one of the members to shirk the responsibility and obedience demanded by the Lord.<sup>1</sup> Whoever in faith hears the Word of God, and is therefore justified and sanctified, shares in the commission given to the Church. But those outside the Church, that is, those who do not hear Jesus Christ in Word and Sacrament, cannot be called and appointed of God to any office in the Church. Consequently, it is by the very nature of the Church impossible for the State to appoint officers over her. To the Church alone is given the power to elect ministers, elders and teachers (professors). The Church, in contrast to the

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1. "If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body, is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body, is it therefore not of the body? ..... But now are they many members, yet but one body. And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you. Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary..... that there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another. And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it. Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular. And God hath set some in the Church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healing, helps, governments, diversities of tongues." I Cor. 12:15-16, 20-22, 25-28.

State, is able to fulfil this task because in her Jesus Christ acts presently through the Spirit. The Church has been promised the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit in her electing, choosing and appointing of office-bearers in the Church. Thus the French Church gratefully confesses: "We believe that we are enlightened in faith by the secret power of the Holy Spirit."<sup>1</sup>

The Church does not call and elect ministers on the basis of her human powers judging the qualifications of a candidate. The calling of a minister by the congregation, his ordination and induction, is decisively an act of faith; it is the recognition through the Spirit that a man is called of God long before the congregation had any notion of selecting him. In electing a minister or any office-bearer, the whole Church bears witness to an event of incredible mercy done by Jesus Christ..... His sending a proclaimer of His Word into their midst, His choosing of one of their wretched, sinful company to be their shepherd.

The old Reformed standards, particularly those of the Scottish Church, devoted considerable space to the election and calling of servants in the Church.<sup>2</sup> A

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1. Art. XXI.

2. See particularly The First Book of Discipline, Chap. IV; The Second Book of Discipline; the Book of Common Order, Chaps. I-IV. Also the Confessio Gallicana, Art. XXIX-XXXIII; the Confessio Belgica, Art. XXX-XXXII.

detailed study of these documents would indeed be fruitful, but as the Barmen Confession confines itself to the fact that this ministry is entrusted to the Church, we will not enter upon it. In view, however, of our earlier statement that all men within the Church are servants, we now add that that does not imply that all offices in the Church are equal, or even that certain men are not given special powers and authorities in the Church. They are! But their power and authority lies solely in their calling by God and its confirmation by the Church,<sup>1</sup> and in their obedience to the Word, in their capacity to serve. Karl Barth, for instance, exercises a tremendous authority in the Evangelical Church. But his authority and his power do not lie in his status as a man, in his intellectual powers or force of personality. His authority, the authority with which he speaks, is the authority of the Word of God. Only in so far as he is a faithful doctor of the Scriptures is he worthy to be heard. Moreover, the fact that the German Church recognises his authority in no way redounds to the credit of that Church. The recognition that he is a "teacher sent by God to the Church" depends solely upon the Holy Spirit

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1. Cf. The Second Book of Discipline, Chap. I, Art. 5, 7, 8.

Who grants "ears to hear".

Similarly the truth that in the Church all men are servants in no way destroys the legitimacy of Church discipline, the necessity of obedience to the courts and doctrines of the Church, and the possibility of excommunication from the Church. Here once again we must be sure of our ground before we make quarrel with Rome on these points.

In conclusion, we would observe that the fourth article of the Barmen Confession is but an expansion of the foregoing three: Jesus Christ manifests His Lordship over the Church in calling and appointing His servants in the Church. They in turn bear thankful testimony to His sovereign power in obedience to Him.

## Section 6: Church and State.

### Article V.

"The Scripture tells us that the State has, according to divine ordinance, the task of providing for law and peace in a world which is not yet redeemed and in which the Church also stands. The State fulfils this task by means of the threat and exercise of force according to the measure of human judgment and human ability. The Church acknowledges in thankfulness towards God the benefit of these His ordinances. She remembers the Kingdom of God, God's commandment and righteousness, and with that the responsibility of rulers and those ruled. She trusts and obeys the power of the Word, by which God sustains all things.

"We reject the false doctrine that the State, over and above its own special commission, ought

and might become the single and totalitarian ordering of human life, and hence fulfil the function of determining the Church as well.

"We reject the false doctrine that the Church, over and above her special commission, ought and might appropriate the character, the tasks and the dignity of the State, and thereby herself become an organ of the State."

#### Article VI.

"The commission of the Church, which is the ground of her freedom, consists in delivering the message of the free grace of God to all people in Christ's stead, and therefore in the ministry of His own Word and work through preaching and sacrament.

"We reject the false doctrine that the Church in human self-glorification might place the Word and work of the Lord in the service of some arbitrarily chosen desires, purposes and plans."

We have already spoken of a distinction between the Church and the world. The Church is the community of sanctified and justified sinners - the place and the community where Jesus Christ acts presently by Word and Sacrament through the Holy Spirit. The Church is both visibly and invisibly distinguished from the world by her form and essence. We come now to a consideration of another distinction between the Church and the world. The world is not world in an unorganised condition. The world is composed of nations, races, States. We know the world to-day in the more or less highly organised form of the State. Now the Church and the State differ from each other not only in their nature and

form, which we have already noted, but also in the commissions given to each and in the methods by which these two commissions are fulfilled. It will be our task in this section to learn precisely what these two commissions are and the corresponding methods by which they are fulfilled. Article V of the Barmen Confession refers to these commissions, but as Article VI describes the Church's commission separately, we have decided to examine both articles together.

"The commission of the Church, which is the ground of her freedom, consists in delivering the message of the free grace of God to all people." - So speaks the Barmen Confession. The old Reformed Confessions were more explicit, defining what is meant by "the message of the free grace of God". We know, however, from Barth's own writing that the law and gospel are comprehended in the message of free grace.<sup>1</sup> Here once again we may observe how the Barmen formula avoids an old issue between the Lutherans and Reformed Churchmen concerning the law and Gospel. The Reformed standards do not speak of the commission given to the Church. They prefer to speak of the power or the nature of the Church.

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1. See Evangelium und Gesetz, in Theologische Existenz heute, No. 32.

However, mention is made of the commission given to ministers, elders, teachers, etc., as we have already seen in our study of the previous two articles.

Generally the old symbols comprehend the commission of the Church under those means by which the commission itself is fulfilled, that is, as the Barmen Article adds, "in the ministry of His own Word and work through preaching and sacrament. But we wish to remain by the single statement of the Church's commission to contrast it immediately with the commission given to the State by God.

According to the Barmen Confession the commission given to the State is to provide for law and peace. The old Confessions maintain the same truth in different language. Usually they venture to explain what providing for law and peace means according to the Scriptures.<sup>1</sup> A glance at the note at the foot of this page will show that the Reformers believed that it was a duty of the State to see that heresies and blasphemies be stamped

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1. The Confessio Gallicana expresses the State's commission as follows in Art. XXXIX: "We believe that God wishes to have the world governed by laws and magistrates..... to suppress crimes against the first as well as against the second table of the Commandments of God."

The Confessio Belgica describes sins against the first table, Art. XXXVI: "We believe that our gracious God..... hath appointed kings, princes and magistrates..... Their office is, not only



out, and that the unity and welfare of the Church be preserved. At that time the Reformers did not appear to see the possibility of the State overstepping its bounds in the fulfilment of this commission. For

to have regard unto and watch for the welfare of the civil state, but also that they protect the sacred ministry, and thus may remove and prevent all idolatry and false worship; that the kingdom of antichrist may be thus destroyed, and the kingdom of Christ promoted. They must, therefore, countenance the preaching of the word of the gospel everywhere, that God may be honoured and worshipped by every one, as He commands in His Word."

The *Confessio Scoticana* reiterates the same, which need not be quoted, but it adds that magistrates and rulers in their States are an ordinance of God, "ordained for manifestatioun of his awin glory, and for the singular profite and commoditie of mankind" (Art. XXIV).

The Westminster Confession repeats the content of its sister Confessions but declares that Christians may "accept and execute the office of a magistrate" (Chap. XXIII, Art. II) although "a magistrate may not assume to himself the administration of the Word and Sacrament, or the power of the keys of the kingdom of heaven" (Art. III). The magistrate may, however, ensure that unity and peace be preserved in the Church. He may also call synods, be present at them, and to provide that whatsoever is transacted in them be according to the mind of God (See Art. III).

The Second Book of Discipline gives the fullest account of the relation of Church and State of all authoritative documents of the 16th century. It is much too long to quote here in full. But we would draw particular attention to Chapter X: Of the Office of a Christian Magistrate in the Kirk. While this chapter does not contradict the Westminster Articles, it does grant to the magistrate a position and a responsibility above that of the ordinary layman.

example, the present German government has genuinely sought the unity and peace of the Church, although not on the basis of theological purity. The German State has endeavoured to secure the unity and peace of the Church according to a worldly principle of totalitarianism. The Church itself can be the only judge of that in which her unity and peace consists. The German Evangelical Church has confessed her unity and her peace in the Barmen Confession. It devolves upon the State to preserve this unity and peace. When the German State fails to see that herein lies her lawful commission - and she has failed - she violates God's commandment, and becomes in fact the power of the anti-christ. In Europe to-day there are two political systems which are nothing less than the powers of the anti-christ - Communism and National Socialism. The State exceeds its rightful and honourable vocation when it becomes a religion, when it places an authority beside or above that of the one, living God. Russia and Germany are guilty of this blasphemy. Both of them, while violently opposed to each other, are united in their opposition to the evangelical Church. In essence and in practice they are utterly incompatible with the revelation in Jesus Christ. And this in spite of the fact that National Socialism claims to stand upon the ground of

'positive Christianity'! The Barmen Confession therefore rejects the false doctrine that the State can fulfil the function of determining the Church or defining what is 'positive Christianity'.

All confessional standards of the Reformed Church teach that the state not less than the Church receives its commission from God. God is not just a "religious" Lord of a "religious community" known as the Church. He is the Lord of all creation, and He rules all His creatures according to His divine wisdom and providence. It is appropriate here to quote the Heidelberg Catechism: "What dost thou understand by the Providence of God? The almighty and everywhere present power of God, whereby, as it were by His hand, He still upholds heaven and earth, with all creatures, and so governs them that herbs and grass, rain and drought, fruitful and barren years, meat and drink, health and sickness, riches and poverty, yea, all things, come not by chance but by His fatherly hand."<sup>1</sup> God, the living and eternal God, does not grant His power and glory to another. God does not cease to be God. He causes wars to begin and wars to cease. He appoints kings and princes, democracies and dictatorships. He institutes revolutions and in His own good time establishes stable governments and peace

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1. Ques. 27.

in the land. He is the Author of our periods of depression and the Restorer of our prosperity. He sits in the councils of the mighty; the magistrates are His lieutenants. In short, God is God! That God is God, and not something less than God, is uniformly the witness of the Reformed Church in all her Confessions. Adolph Hitler rules to-day in Germany, and King George VI occupies the throne of Great Britain only because the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has placed them there, and permits them to continue in their positions.

God ordains kings and rulers, and the State is an ordinance of God. "The Church acknowledges with thankfulness towards God the benefit of these His ordinances," says the Barmen Confession. She joyfully confesses that in politics and economics God is the Lord, even as He is the Lord in the Church. The Church is not cast down when social and political systems change, and when civilisation seems to crumble. For the Church knows that temporal calamities and temporal victories are insignificant in comparison with that catastrophe and restoration which are revealed in the message of Good Friday and Easter. That is to say, as the Barmen Confession puts it, the Church remembers the Kingdom of God, God's righteousness, and she trusts and obeys the Word by which God sustains all things. Consequently

the Church, whether it lives under the terror of a Hitler or a Stalin, or enjoys the liberty and quiet of the British nation, is equally hopeful, equally afraid.<sup>1</sup> For as the Church's hope is not placed in earthly and temporal powers, neither is she afraid of them. The Church's fear and hope is in God. "And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul; but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."<sup>2</sup> The Church's fear and hope are the human correlates of the divine message of the free grace of God, and as such, they are, again as Barmen confesses, "the ground of her freedom". So long as the Church abides in her commission, namely, delivering the message of the free grace of God, she is free. That is to say, she is not bound by the powers of evil, sin, devil, death and the rulers of this world. When the Church places "the Word and work of the Lord in the service of certain arbitrarily chosen desires, purposes and plans," (such as the New Germany or the League of Nations), or "acknowledges as sources of her proclamation apart from and beside the one Word of God still other events, powers, forms and truths," she finds

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1. Luther has remarked that "the Church is never in a more perilous state than when she has quiet and peace".

2. Matt. 10:28.

herself in bondage to this world, to its philosophies and its authorities. Indeed, when the Church abandons her legitimate commission, she automatically "appropriates the character, the tasks and the dignity of the State, and thereby becomes an organ of the State."<sup>1</sup>

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1. To-day the Church in many places has so far forsaken her rightful commission that it is exceedingly difficult to distinguish it from the world or from a humanitarian club. For the end, the ideals and even the methods of the Church and State have become identical. (We speak here more particularly as a Canadian. Let a Scottish theologian speak for his own people.) We said that the end of the Church and State has become identical. The end of the State is the social well-being of each individual in the State, and "the right of each individual to realise his own personality". The Social Gospel, so widely preached in America, the insistence upon "the infinite worth of human personality", and the humanistic doctrines of the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man, all confirm the all-too-human and worldly character of the end for which the modern Church strives. But no State would deny this "end" of human existence. The 'end' of the Church is often described as "bringing in, advancing or extending the Kingdom of God". The Kingdom is conceived as a social, temporal utopia and described in ethical terms. The State readily concurs in this goal because it is, in fact - so long as one does not blasphemously call it the Kingdom of God - the commission given to it. The Church obviously assumes the character of the State when it affirms that the end for which it strives is the same. The Church ought to know, however, that her "end" is to be done away with when the Kingdom of God shall come. The Church should know that her mission is to witness to the Kingdom which has come nigh in Jesus Christ and will be consummated when He comes again in power.

The Church becomes a part of the State when she identifies, secondly, her "ideals" with those

In Germany the "German Christians" wished to place the Church in the service of a united Germany, and National Socialist ideology. In Great Britain the Church has too often placed herself in the service of the State's

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of the State. The trinity of "truth, beauty and love" are consistently proclaimed by the State in its schools, universities, news press, radio, its social welfare clubs, etc. The Church should know, however, that the Righteousness of which she must speak is not the moral ideals of "truth, beauty and love".

Thirdly, the Church assumes the character of the State when she employs the same methods as the State. The Church is to fulfil her mission by preaching and Sacrament, by proclamation. The State fulfils her mission by educational instruction. Not that the Church does not instruct her people. But her instruction is to be regarded as witness to Truth which is above her and for which she waits, and not the dissemination of known truths. The sermon is not a lecture on economics, politics, ethics, art or even the religion of Jesus. The State can and does instruct its members in this way. It applies the best psychological methods. The Church has vied with the State Schools in practising the same psychological principles. But in so far as the knowledge which the Church imparts is qualitatively different from that of the State, her methods can not be determined by John Dewey or Bertrand Russell or The Chicago School of Psychology. It is scarcely our task here to deal with the very urgent problem of Christian education, but it should be seen that the Church, operating with the same principles and presuppositions as are employed in secular education, has once again taken on the character of the State. In so far as the Church's "end", "ideals" and "methods" are the same as the State, she has been swallowed up by the State, has become an organ of the State. It is scarcely any wonder that between this Church and State there is no conflict.

political attitude, as for example, the Italian-Abys-  
 sinian War and the League of Nations. And the Church's  
 theology, both in Germany and in Britain and America  
 during the last few centuries has taken its cue from  
 philosophy. Theology has not had an independence of  
 its own, but has worshipped at the feet of the philo-  
 sophers. It would not be difficult to show the bondage  
 of modern theology to Descartes, Hegel, Spinoza, Kant,  
 Spencer and Darwin, just as it would not be difficult  
 to show the bondage of the Roman Church to Plato, and  
 more especially to Aristotle. Thus, the Church's free-  
 dom in theology is grounded in her commission to deliver  
 the message of the free grace of God. So long as the  
 Church is true to her commission "the gates of hell  
 shall not prevail against her".

The freedom of the Church in the fulfilment of her  
 commission is the freedom of the Word and the Spirit,  
 the mighty freedom of God. No Hitler, no temporal  
 power can stamp out, no devil can hinder the proclama-  
 tion of the Word of God. For proclamation is an act  
 of God and occurs when and where God wills, and always  
 in spite of this world! If, for example, Hitler and  
 Rosenberg succeed in supplanting the Gospel with a  
 Nordic religion in Germany, it will be because God is  
 angry with a faithless people. "Along with the external



oppression of the Church she can be summoned to consider that God is at liberty to take away the light of the Gospel, if we do not want to have it otherwise, even as He once removed the 'candlestick' from the North African Church, which was as much the Church of St. Augustine as the German Church is that of Luther."<sup>1</sup>

The one great fear before which the Church always stands is that God will deprive her of His Word. But so long as she possesses this fear she has the consolation of the promise, "The Lord will not forsake His people".<sup>2</sup>

In this freedom the Church is born and lives.

We have learned from the Reformed Church symbols, including that of Barmen, that the State is an ordinance of God. This proposition is an exposition of Romans 13. When it is said that the State is ordained of God it is not therefore said that it is good. "Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God."<sup>3</sup> The "good" is nowhere directly visible in this world. The "good" is yet to come with the new heaven and new earth. This Coming "good" is disclosed in no earthly State but has been revealed once and for all in the man Christ Jesus. Nor was this "good"

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1. Theological Existence To-day, translated by R. Birch Hoyle, p. 73.

2. I. Sam., 12:22. Cf. Deut. 4:31; Josh. 1:5; Is. 42:16; I Kings 6:13, etc.

3. Matt. 19:17.

directly seen in the humanity of Jesus. That Jesus Christ was the "good", that the Father dwelt in the Son was known only to faith. Consequently, no independent, self-sufficient or absolute righteousness may be ascribed to the State in virtue of its creation by God or its being an ordinance of God. The State together with the whole world is fallen creation. As the Barmen Confession declares, the State has its commission "in a world not yet redeemed and in which the Church also stands". "For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body."<sup>1</sup> Again: "The fashion of this world passeth away."<sup>2</sup> No Reformed Church Confession teaches that the State is ordained good. On the contrary the civil government is ordained of God precisely because mankind, even in its reconciled state, i.e. the Church, is not good. The Confessio Gallicana tells us that God wishes the world governed by laws and magistrates "so that some restraint may be put upon its disordered appetites".<sup>3</sup> "Because of the depravity of

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1. Rom. 8;22-23.

2. I Cor. 7:31.

3. Art. XXXIX.

mankind," is the reason given by the Confessio Belgica.<sup>1</sup> Reformed theology knows of no state when men shall live together in harmony impelled only by the power of love. Reformed theology knows of no temporal future when there will be no need of laws, courts of justice, penitentiaries and armies. In striking contrast to the optimistic idealism of modern Protestantism, Reformed theology sees man with the realism of the Bible, with the realism of Jesus who said: "For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: all these things come from within, and defile the man."<sup>2</sup>

In Germany, the "German Christians" sought to justify the rule of Hitler on the grounds of it having been ordained of God. In Britain, certain Churches applauded the position assumed by the British government towards the League of Nations and the Italian-Abyssinian affair.<sup>3</sup> In both instances the Church did

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1. Art. XXXVI.

2. Mk. 7:21-23.

3. We refer here to public statements made by the Archbishop of Canterbury and to declarations made at the Convention of the English Congregational Churches, 1936.

not confine herself to the commission of delivering the message of the free grace of God, and therefore she placed the Word and work of the Lord in the service of some arbitrarily chosen desires, purposes and plans. However good and worthy these desires, purposes and plans may be from the point of view of the State, the Church denies her true nature when she undertakes to serve them. It is not the business of the Church to justify any human activity as such; it is the joyous privilege of the Church to bear witness to that man - Jesus Christ - in whom all human activity, whether it be political or otherwise, is at once condemned and justified.

Even as the commissions given to the Church and State are different, so are the methods by which they are fulfilled. The Church fulfils her commission, according to the Barmen Confession, "in the ministry of His own Word and work through preaching and sacrament". The State fulfils its task "by means of the threat and exercise of force according to the measure of human judgment and human ability". The old Confessions liked to contrast these two methods by the analogy of the civil and spiritual swords.<sup>1</sup> The Church's power is

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1. "The civill Magistrat craves and gettis Obedience by the Sword, and uther externall Meanis. But the Ministrie, by the spirituall Sword, and

solely the power of the Word of God. The Church, therefore, unless she would assume the character of the State, may never employ the threat and exercise of force in order to defend herself, to govern her members or to attack her enemies. The Church, as the Church, may never resort to the civil sword. She is to confine herself to the proclamation of the Gospel. In so far as the Church of the Old Testament, the people of Israel, waged wars, and enforced laws and tributes, she did so as the Jewish nation. As we have previously observed, the Jewish nation was unique in being simultaneously Church and State, thus fulfilling the two commissions. The Church to-day, however, will see mirrored in the political warfare of Israel her own spiritual warfare against her enemies. No Reformed Church confessional standard sanctions the Church's use of force. In relying solely upon the unseen power of the Word, the Church bears witness to that power by which all temporal powers are created and sustained. Were the Church to resort to the sword she would be denying the power of the Word. She would be putting her trust in a temporal power. She would then truly assume the character of this world. She would have reduced her Resurrection power to one

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spirituall Meanis." - The Second Book of Discipline, Chap I, Art. 13. Cf. Confessio Scoticana, Art. XXIV; the Westminster Confession, Chap. XXIII, Art. I; Confessio Gallicana, Art. XXXIX.

among many earthly powers.

On the other hand, while denying to herself the use of the sword, the Church grants to the State the right to exercise the sword to protect her (the Church) against her enemies. Philip Schaff, commenting upon the Helvetica Posterior, observes that this Confession, in common with others, maintains the right and duty of the civil government to punish heretics. "Nevertheless," he adds, "the Reformation inaugurated the era of religious toleration and freedom."<sup>1</sup> There is no truth in that statement whatever. The idea of religious toleration and freedom is to be traced to the Renaissance and to the Father of modern philosophy, Descartes. The Reformation was born of religious intolerance - an intolerance of all that usurped the glory, majesty and sovereignty of Jesus Christ. Of all religions the Christian religion is the most intolerant, uncompromising

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1. See Note, p. 420, History of Creeds, Vol. I:  
"'Coërceat et haereticos (qui vere haeretica sunt) incorrigibiles, Dei majestatem blasphemare et Ecclesiam Dei conturbare, adeoque perdere non desinentes'. The same view of the right and duty of the civil government to punish heretics is expressed in other Confessions. The Reformers differed from the Roman Catholics, not so much in the principle of persecution as in the definition of heresy and the degree of punishment. Nevertheless, the Reformation inaugurated the era of religious toleration and freedom."

and aggressive. The whole body of literature of the 16th century, including the Confessions, bears signal witness to this fact. Even Schaff himself is unable to deny it, much as he would like to. The "religious freedom" for which the Reformers fought - fought let us note - was not the freedom of the religious man as such, but on the contrary the freedom of the Bible. And subsequently the Reformers fought for the Christian liberty which was found and sustained in a free Bible. The Reformers confessed in the language of the Bible, "Our help is in the name of the Lord, who hath made heaven and earth". They knew, what the modern Church no longer knows, that their "help" was no less the "help" of their countrymen, of the nation, yea, of the whole world. They knew that no State could prosper or endure the wrath of God which did not seek deliverance in the Name of the Lord. Moreover, the Reformers knew that Roman Catholicism, the sects, Communism, Fascism and humanism were grave menaces not only to the Church but also to the State.<sup>1</sup> Is a father who knows that the

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1. In a little pamphlet translated into English under the title, Questions To Christendom, Barth points out that to-day we have entered upon a new era - an era of religions is giving place to the philosophies of the 19th century. He cites Fascism and Communism. He observes that they bear the characteristic mark of a religion - uncompromising, intolerant, dogmatic and evangelistic. Unlike

salvation, peace and consolation of his children is in Jesus Christ to be tolerant toward a German paganism, an American pragmatism, a British humanism? Is a Christian to cease loving and caring for his fellow-citizens just in respect to the riches of the Gospel? Let us admit it: the belief in religious toleration has its origin in the conviction that Christian truths are the result of man's own reflection, willing or feeling, and that therefore each individual has the right to his own ideas. Here the fact of revelation is tacitly denied. Man conceives and manufactures his own god and worships it as he pleases. Excellent - if such were really the case! But the Church bears witness to that event in history in which God spoke to man in Jesus Christ. The reality of this event precludes the very ground upon which religious toleration rests. For the revelation in Jesus Christ is not a product of man's intellect. He is not the highest point in the development of man's understanding of himself and God. Jesus Christ is the Lamb of God who taketh away the sins of the world. As such He has relevance for the State quite as much as for the Church.

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the philosophies of a past day, these religions will not be tolerant to Christianity, and precisely because Christianity cannot be tolerant to them.



The State needs forgiveness, and the State must know it needs forgiveness. It is significant that the Scottish Confessions were all addressed to the civil government and to those in authority in the nation.<sup>1</sup>

There was no desire on the part of the Reformers to separate Church and State.<sup>2</sup> "As the ministers and

1. The Confessio Scoticana states on its frontispiece: "The Confession of the Faith and Doctrine, Belevit and professit be the Protestantis of Scotland, Exhibited to the Estaitis of the same in Parliament, and be their publick Votis authorisit, as a Doctrine groundit upon the infallibil Worde of God, Aug. 1560. And afterwards stablised and publickly confirmed be sundrie Acts of Parliaments, and of lawful General Assemblies."

One of the most interesting of old Scottish documents is The Band of Maintenance, in which the General Assembly of 1590 swore to protect the person of His Majesty, the King, and to withstand with force of arms all foreign and internal powers which threatened the true religion within the land. (See Dunlop's Collection of the Scottish Confessions, Vol. II, pp. 108-113.) Cf. also The Supplication of the Assembly to His Majesty's High Commissioner, and the Lords of Secret Council, of the General Assembly of 1639. The National Covenant of 1638 was first subscribed to by people from every rank and station in society and afterwards approved by the General Assembly. The First Book of Discipline was drawn up by John Knox and five other theologians, presented first to the nobility in 1560 and afterwards subscribed to by the Kirk and Lords.

2. See Volkskirche, Freikirche, Bekenntnis-kirche in Evangelische Theologie, November 1936, for a full discussion of this subject.

others of the ecclesiastical state are subject to the magistrate civil, so ought the person of the magistrate be subject to the Kirk spiritually, and in ecclesiastical government."<sup>1</sup> Church and State do not stand opposed to each other, when each recognises and fulfils its true commission. The Church is only above the State in its special commission, while the State is above the Church in the exercise of its commission. Nor is the Church to be the judge of the State's prosecution of its commission. The State has been given the right to preserve law and peace, "according to the measure of human judgment and human ability" given to it. The State, therefore, will make itself as competent as possible in economics, politics, sociology, hygiene and military matters. The Church ought not to set herself up as a body of experts in these sciences. Even if she were competent to deal with them, she belies her own commission in doing so. On the other hand, the State will not venture to interfere in the form and message of the Church. Even if it were competent to practise theology, it likewise denies its legitimate function. The Church, moreover, unlike the State, does not fulfil her task according to the measure of human judgment and

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1. The Second Book of Discipline, Chap. I, Art. 9.

ability, but, while using them - for the Church is also human - submits them to the judgment of Scripture and the Holy Spirit.

The Church, we said, owes obedience to the State. This requires an explanation. The Barmen Confession simply says that the Church remembers the responsibility of rulers and those ruled. Certain of the old Confessions detailed the obedience due the State. For instance, the Westminster Confession tells us that "it is the duty of people to pray for magistrates, to honour their persons, to pay them tribute and other dues, to obey their lawful commands, and to be subject to their authority, for conscience sake. Infidelity or difference in religion doth not make void the magistrate's just and legal authority, nor free the people from their due obedience to him, from which ecclesiastical persons are not exempted".<sup>1</sup> The same document elsewhere states that Christians "may lawfully, now under the New Testament, wage war upon just and necessary occasions".<sup>2</sup> Not only did the Reformers sanction this obedience but they condemned disobedience most strongly. The Confessio Belgica declares: "We detest the error of the Anabaptists and other seditious people (we should have to include

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1. Chapter XXIII, Art. IV.

2. Chapter XXIII, Art. II.

the Quakers in our day), and in general all those who reject the higher powers and magistrates, and would subvert justice, introduce a community of goods, and confound that decency and good order which God hath established among men."<sup>1</sup>

In opposition to the authority of the State, and contrary to the teaching of the Reformed Church, the present pacifist movement condemns all military service. There are, of course, degrees of pacifism. Some assert that participation in a war of self-defence is justifiable, while others, more extreme, maintain that war is wrong at all times. The issue, as the authors of our Confessions saw it, was not whether war was right or not, but whether a Christian ought to obey the State when it is fulfilling its commission by the threat and exercise of force. To deny obedience to the State on this one point was tantamount to denying to the State the right to exercise force at all. It amounted to a denial of the commission given to the State to administer law and order. When the issue was seen accordingly, militarism raised no greater problem than that of the legitimacy of a police-force. From the standpoint of the commission given by God to the State, those problems

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1. Art. XXXVI. Cf. Confessio Gallicana, Art. XL; the Helvetica Posterior, Chap. XXX.

of war, revolution, anarchy and lawlessness must be attacked. We will therefore not enter into the merits of the pacifists' case on the basis of Scripture, save to observe that no Church at any time has elevated the doctrine of pacifism into a dogma. The Reformed Church repudiates the position of the Quakers. Pacifists, therefore, who carry their doctrine to the point of denying obedience to the State, automatically place themselves outside the Reformed Church. They must needs found another Church, or rather - for that is impossible - another sect.

Pacifism is just one sign of the unbridled desire of our age to be free of all authority. The idea of obedience to those in authority, on the other hand, is consistently set forth throughout the whole Bible. Christians are not only "to render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's" even when Caesar is a tyrant,<sup>1</sup> but children are to obey their parents in all things,<sup>2</sup> wives are to obey their husbands<sup>3</sup> and employees are to be obedient to their employers.<sup>4</sup> Christians are neither

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1. Cf. Calvin, Institutes, Bk. IV, Chap. XX, Secs. 24-30.

2. Eph. 6:1.

3. Eph. 5:22; Col. 3:18; Titus, 2:5; I Pet. 3:1.

4. Eph. 6:5.

revolutionaries nor anarchists. They manifest joyful obedience to God in concrete obedience to those whom He has set above us. "Behold, the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance: behold he taketh up the isles as a very little thing. All nations before him are as nothing; and they are counted to him less than nothing, and vanity."<sup>1</sup>

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1. Is. 40:15, 17.

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CHAPTER II.THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE BARMEN CONFESSION.

In dealing with the significance of the Barmen Confession, which we propose to do in this chapter, we are not unmindful of the subject of our thesis, The Relation of Karl Barth to the Historical Creeds and Standards of the Church. As Barth is the author of the Barmen Confession, his influence and significance cannot be separated from the Confession. Similarly because we will have to do with significance of the German Evangelical Church for our Churches, we cannot separate either that Church or its Confession from the person of Karl Barth. Regarded from the human and purely historical standpoint, Barth is largely responsible for the existence of the Confessional Church. We therefore ask our readers to bear in mind this interdependence of theologian, Confession and Church as we bring to a conclusion in this chapter our study of the relation of Karl Barth to the confessional standards of the Reformed Church.

It is an astonishing fact which should give rise to profound and searching reflection that not since the Reformation has the Church been able to produce a

Confession of Faith which has been comparable to those which appeared in the 16th and early 17th century until the appearance of the Barmen Confession of the German Evangelical Church in May 1934. Because Barmen breaks through the silence of 400 years, it marks a new epoch in the history of the Church and perhaps also in the political history of a nation. The power of a Confession to mould history, to shape the thought and lives of whole nations was certainly manifested in the 16th century in Germany, and even more so in Scotland. Moreover the power and influence of the Reformation Confessions were not restricted to the day in which they appeared; the effect lives on till the present day in the political and religious life of the western nations. Who, possessed with the slightest historical insight, will venture to deny the power and authority of a Confession? Not only did our Reformed Churches take their rise in their Confessions, but the peoples rose to a new national consciousness and sense of unity. In the Confessions pure doctrine was set forth, and heresies which rent both the Church and the State were condemned. A new piety and a new morality stamped itself upon the character of the people. A generation of men arose who feared naught but God and who experienced a joyful sense of liberation. And they bequeathed to their more



or less grateful descendants a precious heritage. The riches of the Gospel were affirmed and proclaimed. The Word of God and not the word of man sounded forth from Sunday to Sunday throughout the land. Impure and pagan practices in the worship of God were abandoned, and the tyranny, ignorance and superstition of Rome were routed. Families were united under the Word of God, and the Bible was read and understood not piously, but quite soberly as the source of all light and the gift of eternal life. No longer were men "without hope in the world"; no longer did they "sit in darkness".

It cannot be disputed that Luther, Calvin and Knox altered the course of history with their Confessions. Nowhere was this more true than in Scotland where not only the Church but also the State, its laws and educational system, were determined by the Confession of Faith.

Barely three years have elapsed since the Barmen Confession was published. We are therefore hardly in the position to appraise its value and influence accurately. What power it will yield in the religious and political life of Germany in the future can only be guessed. Nevertheless, certain achievements already are visible. First of all, in the Barmen Confession a Church was born, a Church which hitherto was uncertain

as to what a Church exactly is and what are its proper functions. More remarkable, however, is the fact that the Lutheran and Reformed Churches were united in a partial union, a thing which has been quite impossible throughout the 400 years of their existence. The way has been opened for a complete union in which both Churches will observe the Lord's Supper together. Whether this complete union will be achieved rests with God. We cannot over-emphasise the fact that this partial union was accomplished in the Barmen Confession which Barth wrote. And it was secured, not at the sacrifice of the old Confessions of both communions but with their confirmation.

Karl Barth is well known to English readers for his doctrines of the Word of God and the Trinity. Had he done nothing more than expound these two most fundamental and difficult doctrines he would have earned a rank among the great teachers of the Christian Church. Little is known by English readers of his work upon the Church and her Confession of Faith. We are persuaded that here is to be found his most decisive, effective and lasting contribution. For the Barmen Confession is achieving and will achieve in a measure just those effects which flowed from the confessional books of the Reformation. Barth has written dogmatics and a Confession.

Inasmuch as a Confession takes precedence over dogmatics (See Part I, Chap. I, Sec. 5 of this thesis), Barth's work is to be judged accordingly. His doctrine has been confessed by the Church! Behind his words stands the authority of the Church, the Church of the Reformation, the Church of Luther and Calvin. As we have pointed out previously in this book, Barth no longer speaks as an independent, free theologian. He is a teacher sent by God to the Church.

The real significance of Karl Barth lies in the fact that he has made the Reformation, and with the Reformation the Bible, contemporaneous for us. Through Barth's writings and the Barmen Confession we hear the voices of Calvin and Luther. They are made to speak to us, not as theologies of a by-gone and old-fashioned age, but as contemporaries. We are made to see that our problems, though in a different form, are essentially the same. Henceforth we will be unable to treat of the Reformation and its symbols simply in "the light of their day", as products of an unenlightened age. With the recurrence of a genuine Reformed Confession in this 20th century, the boasted intellectual advances and the spiritual development are exposed as shams. The Reformation has overtaken us, and we are unable to dismiss it as out-of-date. We will not be able to repudiate

Barth's theology and the Barmen articles of faith without at the same time repudiating our Reformed Church origins. Whoever takes exception to Barth's fundamental position should realise that he is cutting himself off from the Reformed Church. The spirits are dividing. In Germany they divided over the Barmen Confession. And the issue over which they divided was not whether certain folk wanted to be "Barthian", but whether they wished to be true to the Reformed Church. The present writer objects quite as much to being called a "Barthian" as Barth himself does. But one should have no objection to being called Reformed, if one conscientiously wishes to become Reformed. Unfortunately, modern Protestantism is neither Reformed nor gives any marked signs of desiring to be. Those who are opposed to Barth, whether they know it or not, are as much opposed to Luther, Calvin and Knox.

In what does the essential difference between our Churches and those of the Reformation and Barmen consist? "If one asks the Reformers themselves the significance which they ascribed to their deeds and aims, one arrives at the conclusion that they were contending for the pure teaching of Christian truths, and in and with it, the pure doctrine of genuine obedience, of the true life, of the right form of the Church; or negatively, the true

freedom from Papistry as from a form of ecclesiastical worship of God, of an ecclesiastical law and ethic which were not compatible with this pure doctrine. This we can take as an answer to our question. The Evangelical Church in the sense of the Reformation is there, and only there, where there is pure teaching of Christian truths, where the whole life of the Church is grounded in this one task, and is measured by it."<sup>1</sup>

But what is meant by pure doctrine? Purity of doctrine consists in its conformity to that of the prophets and apostles.<sup>2</sup> Were this not the case we would have to say that something other than the Christian Church had been founded.<sup>3</sup> "The Christian thought and speech of the Reformation, as it found expression in its doctrine, was like that of the prophets and apostles in that it proceeded from a newly-formed decision."<sup>4</sup>

But there is a countless variety of decisions. What is the precise nature of that decision which determined the Reformers and their doctrine? "All human decisions, even the most serious and the most weighty, with one exception, are of such a nature that man, so

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1. Theologische Existenz heute, No. 3, Reformation als Entscheidung, p. 4 f.

2. Ibid. p. 9.

3. Ibid. p. 10.

4. Ibid. p. 10.

long as he has time, is able to overhaul, correct and replace them with new decisions. We have only too often experienced how people one day seem to stand by the firmest decisions and then, behold, on the next day can do exactly the opposite. It is therefore obvious that in all his decisions, with the exception of one, man seizes one of his own possibilities.... As long as he has time, in his lost freedom he is able to pledge himself differently to-day than he did yesterday, and then again, quite differently to-morrow. A decision which cannot be revoked, and therefore one in which man is irrevocably bound, in which he would now truly forfeit his freedom, must be of such a kind that he has no more time for a reversal of this decision. This decision - if we may be permitted to omit the decision to commit suicide - can be no other than the decision for Christian faith. In this decision man has irrevocably bound himself..... The decision for Christian faith is the decision for God as the Lord of man.... 'Ye cannot serve God and Mammon', (Matt. 6:24; Lk. 16:9).

One should note that it does not say: You should not! but - You cannot! .... You cannot believe, and still want to remain free not to believe at some other time. In this decision you are bound. Each future decision, regarded from your standpoint, can only be a strengthening

and confirmation of it. You are God's! In this decision for Christian faith man says with the prophet: 'O Lord, thou has deceived me, and I was deceived: thou art stronger than I, and hast prevailed' (Jer. 20:7) and so with the apostle, 'forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching unto those things which are before' (Phil. 3:13). The movement which is described in these words is unequivocal and irreversible. The man who is caught in this movement has as little control over the direction which it takes than a babe in arms. In fact, he himself has become such a child. He exists now in this direction and can have his future only in this direction. Only the decision to die or the decision for God the Lord can have this unconditional character. This decision, however, in which the Reformation doctrine originated, had this character. And this is the important thing - the purity of Christian truths in the doctrine of the Reformation. An example may be seen in the Reformation doctrine of Holy Scripture. God is to be found of us men where it has pleased Him to have us find Him. Not there where we imagine to be able to find Him, not in the realm of our possibilities, whether it be now reason or experience, nature or history. Not there where we in our wisdom think we are to speak of Him, but there where He has spoken

to us in His wisdom. He has spoken to us once and for all. To this perfect tense - DEUS DIXIT - Holy Scripture alone testifies. Therefore, the proclamation of the Church can in no sense be a philosophy, that is to say, a development of any one of the self-discovered world-views or philosophies of life. It is consequently bound to interpretation of Scripture. The Reformation doctrine of Holy Scripture is immediately understandable to those who realise that it speaks of the conclusively-made decision. It states that after God sought us in the miracle of His condescension in Christ Jesus, of Whom the prophets and apostles are witnesses, all our efforts to discover Him for ourselves became not only pointless, but were rendered impossible. After God has spoken to man, man has absolutely no more time to instruct himself concerning God. In this decision the doctrine of Holy Scripture could not have been otherwise presented than was done by the Reformers with such severity and yet at the same time with such joyfulness. In this decision there could not and cannot exist the slightest necessity for a natural theology."<sup>1</sup>

In the light of this final and irrevocable decision we are to understand the Reformation. So too are we

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1. Ibid. p. 11 f.



to understand the Barmen Confession and the German Evangelical Church. As decision! Unless we make the decision which the authors of our Reformed standards made, we will never be in the position to understand them, much less to criticise them. Once having made this decision, however, we will be one with the Church of the Reformation and the Confessional Church in Germany in the concern for the purity of the faith. Then we too will be a confessional Church.

We have already referred to the effect of a genuine Confession upon the political life of a people. For a full account of the influence of Barth's writings and the various Confessions of the German Church upon the political life of that nation we would refer the reader to two books by Adolph Keller, Karl Barth and Christian Unity and Religion and the European Mind. We will not recount here the material given in these two reports. But it should be borne in mind that in Germany theology and politics enjoy no separate autonomy. Theology is decisive for attitudes and actions taken by members of the State. It should also be realised that the Confessional Church is the only body which has successfully survived Hitler's ruthless practice of subordinating everything to the rule and ideology of the totalitarian State. So long as the German Church

remains a Confessional Church, neither Hitler nor all the powers of hell shall prevail against her. Judging from the writer's observations while in Germany, there is reason to believe that the Confession Church will never be satisfied with religious liberty nor a truce with the State; the Church will in all probability demand that the State subscribe to her Confession, and model its laws and educational policy in accordance with the law of God.

We have dealt with the significance of Karl Barth and the Barmen Confession for the Church and State in Germany. What significance has the Barmen Declaration for our Churches in Britain and America? It challenges us to repentance and to faith. It challenges us to confess the sole Lordship of Jesus Christ and to condemn those false doctrines and practices which have usurped His Lordship. It invites us to tread the path of faith and obedience with it. It asks us how far we are Reformed and whether we wish to be Reformed. The Confession of the Reformed Church, which was also composed by Barth and was promulgated in January of 1934, rejects the view that "the development of the Church since the Reformation has been a natural one". May the same judgment be passed upon our Churches? Is there a need for us to examine our Reformed origins, our

confessional standards? Do we need to confess and repent of our own sins and the sins of our Fathers? Do we feel ourselves attacked by intolerable heresies? Is it imperative that we re-affirm the old symbols? These are questions addressed to us by the Barmen Confession.

We foresee that the Barmen Confession will have a very concrete significance for our Churches in their relations with the German Evangelical Church through the media of the Ecumenical Council, the World of Alliance of Churches holding the Presbyterian System and the Conference for World Faith and Order. As we write we have before us The British Weekly, of April 8, 1937, in which appears a statement by Professor Dibelius upon the attitude of the Confessional Church towards the Oxford and Edinburgh Conferences. "Her (the Confessional Church) task will be to call the other Churches, along with herself, under the Word. She will demand that even questions connected with Church union shall all be placed with remorseless sincerity under the judging office of the Word of God. She will demand that all ecclesiastical traditions shall be tested by that Word, and that only those things which can be justified by that standard shall be acknowledged as the common possession of the one Christian Church." This is just the stand which the Confessional Church

has taken in Germany. We would hardly expect her to discard her Confession as soon as she entered upon relations with Churches of other lands.

The Confessional Church places the Ecumenical Council, the World Alliance of Presbyterian Churches, and all other 'unions', leagues and conventions in which representatives of Churches of various countries meet together, before the confessional question.<sup>1</sup> The Confessional Church is the Church which wishes to be defined exclusively by her Confession. It is therefore fundamentally impossible to engage upon a discussion with this Church at any one point without immediately raising the confessional issue. Because the Confessional Church has learned in the course of her Church struggle that from the proclamation of the Gospel to Church taxes, the Confession, and only the Confession, must define the Church; because she has learned that there are no neutral or confession-less spheres within

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1. Note: Much of the material which is given here concerning the relation of the German Evangelical Church with Churches of other countries is taken from an article by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Die Beken nende Kirche und die Oekumene, in Evangelische Theologie, August 1935. Coming as it does from a responsible theologian of the Confessional Church, it carries more weight than the private observations and judgments of the present writer.

the Church, she inevitably places her partner in any conversation before the confessional question. There is no other approach to the Confessional Church save through the Confession. Thus the German Church bars the way to every political, social or humanitarian invasion. The Confession fills all spheres. To the Barmen Confession one can only say Yes or No. Compromise and hedging are excluded at the start.

That, to be sure, is an extraordinary demand. But it is the only possible way in which the Confessional Church can have communion with other Churches. One must know this in order to understand the Church in Germany, and in order to interpret her language correctly. If the German Church were to abandon this position, the fight in Germany would already be decided against her, as well as the fight for Christianity.

The Confessional Church will ask, Is the Ecumenical Council 'Church'? Is the real ecumenical character of the Church as witnessed to in the New Testament to be found in the present organisation? The question turns upon the authority with which the Ecumenical Council speaks. The question of authority is decisive. If the Ecumenical Council is the Church, it is as unchangeable as the Church of Jesus Christ. Either it realises in itself the old hope of evangelical Christianity

to be the one true Church of Christ among all peoples of the earth, or it realises the titanic and anti-christian attempt of man to make visible what God wishes to be concealed from our eyes. The unity of the Ecumenical Church either consists in the obedience to the promise of Jesus Christ that there should be one Shepherd and one flock, or she is a kingdom in the form of angels built upon the lies of the devil, a kingdom of a false peace and a false unity. Every Church stands before these two alternatives, and the Ecumenical Church is no exception. In her Confession of Faith the German Evangelical Church confronts all other Churches with these two alternatives. Henceforth it will be impossible to confess ignorance and thus evade the issue.

Before a discussion between various Churches can take place certain presuppositions must be acknowledged. In the Ecumenical Council it has been said that the discussions are between Christians. Whence will the criterion be obtained whereby one can determine who a Christian is? Or who is not a Christian? But is not the judgment upon individual persons and their Christianity explicitly forbidden in the Bible, whereas decisions about the doctrines and heresies of the Church enjoy the Biblical sanction? Is not the indisputable commandment under which the Ecumenical Council stands,

the commandment to try the spirits whether they be of God? And when this commandment is not acknowledged, will a theological discussion result in anything but a wicked pastime? Especially when it conceals the fact that it ought not to be concerned with unobligatory, theological speculation, but with responsible, binding and legitimate ecclesiastical decisions? At any rate, the Confessional Church fears to participate in theological discussions which are not binding upon her. The present writer enjoyed the inestimable privilege of studying the faith and practice of the German Church while a guest of some five months in the home of Herr Doctor Hermann Hesse, moderator of the Reformed Church in Germany, and one of the foremost leaders in the Confessional Church to-day. This fear of irresponsible, unecclesiastical theological discussion is a genuine fear. There is truly a much greater fear of performing an act which is not done in obedience to Christ, i.e. which is not executed within the Church.

Either the necessity of a division of the spirits will be acknowledged as the presupposition of all ecumenical work, or this presupposition will be rejected as false and not permissible. In that event the conception of the Ecumenical Church in the sense of the New Testament and the Reformation Confessions will be

discarded at the start. The strongest argument which is brought against acting upon this presupposition is that the Ecumenical Council would be disrupted if the question of the nature of the Church were seriously raised and doctrinal decisions executed. This possibility cannot be denied. 'The Council has sought to avoid contentious issues. But with the entrance of the Confessional Church such a pacific policy can no longer be pursued. There is only one salvation for Ecumenical work - that it humbly accepts the question put to it. Who knows<sup>but</sup> that a stronger and more powerful Ecumenical Council would not emerge as a result of this disquieting task? Even if a serious rupture ensues, is not the commandment and the promise of God strong enough to guide the Church through these storms? Does not a greater security lie in this commandment than in a false peace and in an illusory unity?

The question which has arisen and awaits an answer is: Is the Ecumenical Council 'Church' or not? Upon what does it base its claim to be a Church? A Church exists only as a confessional Church, that is, as a Church which confesses herself to ~~be~~ the Lord and against His enemies. A confession-less or a confessionally free Church is not a Church! but a sect which exalts itself above the Bible and the Word of God. The Confession is



the expressed and formulated answer which the Church makes in her own words to the Word of God in Scripture. To the true unity of the Church belongs the unity in a Confession of Faith. From this standpoint, can the Ecumenical Council claim to be 'Church'?

The means by which the Council seeks to justify its claim to be Church is usually as follows: according to Scripture there is one, holy, ecumenical Church. The existing Churches are special forms of the one. As the branches extend from the trunk of a tree, as the members are part of the body, so is the fellowship of all Churches in the world the one true ecumenical Church. The meaning of ecumenical work then is the exhibition of the riches and harmony of Christianity. No single Church is able to claim to be the only true Church; each brings its special gifts and performs its special service for the whole. It is astonishing what power of attraction this idea possesses. It is, so to speak, the dogma of the ecumenical movement, and it is not easy to combat. Nevertheless, it is just this idea which the Confessional Church must explode. For this 'dogma' conceals the seriousness of the ecumenical problem and the problem of the Church itself.

No matter how true and Biblical the proposition may be that only in unity is the truth, the other proposition

that only in the truth is there unity, is equally true and Biblical. Where unity is sought apart from the question concerning the truth, there the Church has ceased to be a Church. Truth possesses the power to cause divisions and separations, or else it is dissolved. Where truth stands opposed to truth, there is no longer harmony. The romantic, aesthetic and liberal conception of the Ecumenical Church does not take the question of the truth earnestly. Consequently it affords no possibility of making the Ecumenical Council understood as Church. With the question concerning the truth, however, nothing else is expressed than the question of the Confession of Faith in a positive and quite definite sense, with its confitemur and its damnamus.

There is no point in denying the fact that when the confessional issue is raised a situation is created in which all conversation may be broken off. In respect to such a situation the Confessional Church doubtless knows better than any one Church in the world. The conversation with the "German Christians" has been finally terminated. It was not a judgment upon christian or unchristian personalities; on the contrary it was a judgment upon the spirit of a Church which was recognised and condemned as opposed to the spirit of

Christ. It is obvious that the conversation cannot be resumed upon some other ground, such as, for instance, an ecumenical conference. The Ecumenical Council and all other Alliances must understand that representatives of the Confessional Church and the "German Christians" cannot engage in a discussion at their meetings. That explains why Barth refused to participate in the convention which was held in Geneva in 1936 on the occasion of the Calvin celebrations.

Now it would be sheer doctrinal bigotry to conclude from the above that confessional Churchmen could not meet with delegates of the Anglican Church or of a semi-Pelagian, free Church theology. That kind of talk knows nothing of the meaning of a living Confession. It conceives the Confession as a dead system with which one systematically measures and judges other Churches. The Confessional Church does not confess in abstracto. It does not confess against the Anglicans and the Free Churches, nor for the moment against Rome. It confesses in concretissimo against the "German Christians" and the pagan worship of nature. For the Confessional Church the anti-Christ does not sit in Rome or Geneva, but in Berlin. Against the Berlin Church government the Confession is directed, because from Berlin and not from Rome, Geneva or London the Christian Church in

Germany is immediately threatened.

Living Confession does not mean putting dogmas over against other dogmas. It is rather a question of life and death. Certainly, a formulated, clear, theologically grounded and genuine Confession. But here theology is not the fighting partner, but serves the fighting and confessing Church. The Confessional Church does not encounter Churches with different Confessions as deadly enemies. Instead, she too shares in the guilt of a divided Christianity. She places herself under the burden of this guilt. Hence it follows that the Confessional Church does not approach the Ecumenical Council putting questions and making demands. She comes not as a judge. She comes as a Church which must be true to her Confession. She comes confessing her sins. Only in so far as the Confessional Church witnesses to herself as thoroughly the Church of sinners, will her Confession against the enemies of Jesus Christ be worthy of belief and be proclaimed with power. The Confessional Church cannot take part in ecumenical work as though she were the congregation of the justified in virtue of Confession and her orthodoxy. She participates as the Church which needs justification. Precisely because the Confessional Church - yes, the Confessional Church! -

ever again stands in the same need as all other Churches, she cannot hold herself aloof. She cannot operate with a priori assumptions. To be sure, she must act as a confessional Church, but she will leave to God what may be the outcome.

Rather than indulge in vain speculations concerning the future, would it not be well for us to conclude our study at this point, and leave to God what may be the significance of Karl Barth, the German Evangelical Church and her Barmen Confession for the ecclesiastical and political life of Germany and the nations of the world in the years that lie ahead?

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A P P E N D I X.

I.

THE CONFESSION OF FAITH  
of the  
FREE REFORMED SYNOD IN BARMEN-GEMARKE,  
January 3-4, 1934.  

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Declaration concerning the right understanding of the  
Reformation Confessions of Faith in the German  
Evangelical Church of the present.

The three hundred and twenty Reformed elders and ministers who have assembled from a hundred and sixty-seven evangelical congregations in Germany at a free Reformed synod declare that the explanation concerning the right understanding of the Reformation Confessions in the German Evangelical Church of the present, which was composed by Herr Professor Dr Barth, and which they have heard, bears witness to the truth of Holy Scripture, and gratefully take it upon their own responsibility.

I. - The Church in the Present.

1. In view of the ecclesiastical events of the year 1933 the Word of God leads us to repentance and

conversion. For in these events an error has become ripe and visible which has had a devastating effect upon the Evangelical Church for centuries. It consists in the opinion that beside God's revelation, God's grace and God's glory a justifiable arbitrariness of man has also to determine the message and form of the Church, that is to say, the temporal way to eternal salvation.

The view is herewith rejected that the development of the Church since the Reformation has been a normal one, and that in the need of our Church to-day it is only a matter of a passing disturbance, after the removal of which that development may proceed in a straight line.

2. This error is the same as the error of the Church of the Pope and of the fanatics, against which the Reformation Confession of Faith is directed. If the Evangelical Church succumbs to it, it has ceased to be an Evangelical Church. It must be established and combated as an error even in its subtlest and purest forms; and the old Confession must be set against the old error with a new joyfulness and explicitness.

The view is herewith rejected that the error of human arbitrariness in matters of the message and form of the Church is an opinion among others which could have now as before, at least in its more lofty forms, a

right within the Evangelical Church.

3. In view of the unanimity with which the error has appeared to-day, the congregations which have been drawn closely together in the one German Evangelical Church are called upon to recognise anew, in spite of their Lutheran, Reformed or United origins and responsibilities, the exaltation of the one Lord of the one Church and therefore the essential unity of their faith, their love, and their hope, their proclamation by preaching and Sacrament, their Confession of Faith and their task.

The view is herewith rejected that the authorised representation of the Lutheran, Reformed or United 'interests' may or might still be set above the requirements of the general, evangelical confessing and action against error and on behalf of truth.

## II. - The Church Under Holy Scripture.

1. The Church derives her origin and her existence exclusively from the Revelation, the authority, the comfort and the guidance of the Word of God which the eternal Father has spoken once for all through Jesus Christ, His eternal Son, in the power of the Holy Spirit when the time was fulfilled.

The view is herewith rejected that the Church could



or might be founded upon, or related to anything except the revelation of the triune God or to a revelation of God which in spite of the fall of man was accessible to man in nature and history.

2. The Church hears that Word of God which has been spoken once and for all through the free grace of the Holy Spirit in the twofold yet single witness of the Old and New Testaments which is mutually conditioned in both of its essential parts, that is to say, in the witness of Moses and the prophets to the coming of Jesus Christ, and in the witness of the evangelists and apostles to Jesus Christ who has come.

The view is herewith rejected that the Biblical writings are to be understood as witnesses from the history of human piety; that the New Testament is preponderantly or exclusively the standard for Christian piety; that the Old Testament could or must therefore be considered of no value, repressed or entirely eliminated in favour of the New.

3. The Church lives by the free grace of the Holy Spirit in that, while she adopts the witness of Holy Scripture in faith and obediently transmits it, she recognises and proclaims the sternness and the mercy, the glory and the graciousness of the triune God to men.

The view is herewith rejected that the Church could

and might still establish and confess God's working in the events of the present at a given time in addition to His action in Jesus Christ which is witnessed to by Holy Scripture.

### III. - The Church in the World.

1. The Church is in the world. In consequence of the incarnation of the Word of God she unreservedly acknowledges the utter need of man, who was created good by God, but who fell into sin and stands under the divine curse. She trusts and obeys alone the mercy which meets this man in Jesus Christ. According to God's promise she waits for a new heaven and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

The view is herewith rejected that the Church could or might bestow her unreserved trust in a righteousness of this world knowable by man, apart from the mercy of God in Christ, and render unreserved obedience to a legality peculiar to this world and knowable by man.

2. According to the direction of the Word of God the Church gratefully acknowledges that changes in the history of humanity and of nations, the political, philosophical and cultural efforts of man stand under the regulation of the divine command and the divine patience. She therefore accompanies such attempts

with earnest acknowledgment of their temporal, definite and limited right. But while interceding for them, she also recalls the Kingdom of God, the law and judgment of God, setting her hope in Him Who guides all things in order to make all things new.

The view is herewith rejected that the Church could or might discern in this or that attempt of man, not so much a proof of divine patience as rather an approximation to the restoration of the divine order of creation.

3. In the world the Church is under Holy Scripture. She serves man and the nation, the State and culture by concerning herself with being obedient to the Word of God prescribed for her, and to His Holy Spirit in respect to her message and her form.

The view is herewith rejected that the Church has to serve men in that, obeying men rather than God, she conforms her message and her form to man's convictions, wishes and purposes from time to time, and places them at his disposal.

#### IV. - The Message of the Church.

1. The Church's commission consists in setting forth, by means of sermon and sacrament, in interpretation of and in accordance with the prophetic-apostolic witnesses, in place of Christ and therefore in service

to His own Word and work, the message of the Kingdom of God at hand. In free grace God the Creator has adopted His creatures, God the Reconciler has adopted sinners and God the Redeemer has adopted His beloved children.

The view is herewith rejected that the Church, while pronouncing her own word, could or might 'dynamically' effect the Word of God the Creator, Reconciler and Redeemer, instead of serving it, and therefore instead of proclaiming free grace.

2. The free grace in which God adopts us, is the promise fulfilled in the power of the Holy Spirit, of the presence of Jesus Christ as the Lord, Who for us became a servant in order to mortify our old life and to bring our new one to light.

The view is herewith rejected that the grace of God consists in moral or religious perfections of which man could boast not only as regards him who justifies the godless, but also as regards some possession of their own.

3. The gift of grace is our belonging to Jesus Christ: in Him we are justified by the miracle of faith which ever again accepts the forgiveness of sins which takes place in Him. And in Him we are sanctified by the miracle of obedience which ever anew places itself under the judgment and direction of the commandment

which proceeds from Him.

The view is herewith rejected that (a) the 'Gospel' and the 'Law', our justification and our sanctification, are not the revelation and the work of the one grace of Jesus Christ; that (b) our justification as sinners is accomplished in that we suddenly or gradually become better men; that (c) our being claimed to obedience to God's commandment is not also the gift of free grace or that this sanctification of ours is something other than a gift of free grace.

4. Our life which is grounded in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit and which we must entreat from Him anew each day, waits in faith and obedience for its redemption through the coming Lord: in the resurrection of the dead, through judgment and unto eternal life.

The view is herewith rejected that a life in faith and obedience might in any respect be a life bound up in itself, sufficient in itself and released from a waiting upon the coming Lord, and therefore from a hoping in Him and a fear before Him.

#### V. - The Form of the Church.

1. The Church of Jesus Christ is the visibly and temporally formed reality of the congregation which is called, assembled and supported, comforted and ruled by the Lord Himself through the ministry of proclamation.

And the Church is likewise the visibly and temporally formed reality of the unity of such congregations (Gemeinden).

The view is herewith rejected that the Church receives her temporal and visible form in virtue of her own discretion, or in virtue of external necessities, like a religious society the principle of which could be realised in one form as in another.

2. The form of the Church is so determined that her outward order as well as her inward life stand under the promise and under the command of Jesus Christ as the sole Lord of the Church. Separately and as a whole, the congregations are responsible to Him that the ministries of proclamation and oversight, and the ministries of doctrine and love which accompany proclamation, are made available in her midst by men with a vocation, and that they are properly exercised by the same.

The view is herewith rejected that the responsibility for the appointment and the administration of the ministries of the Church could be taken over from the congregations by a special supreme board of the Church.

3. The Church of Jesus Christ, so far as her message and form is concerned, is one and the same in different

times and among different races, peoples, states and cultures. The right to ecclesiastical differences stands or falls with the question of their being compatible with the unity of her message and her form.

The view is herewith rejected that (a) the right to temporal, national and local differences in Church forms is derivable from special revelations of God in history; that (b) it is compatible with the unity of the message and form of the Church to limit the membership and the qualification for service in her to those belonging to a particular race.

4. On the basis of the guidance of the Word of God the Church recognises in the State the ordinance of divine command and divine patience, in virtue of which man may and must attempt, as far as he can understand it from reason and history, in responsibility to the Lord of all lords, to discover law and to administer and maintain it by force. The Church cannot deprive the State of this its special office. At the same time, however, she cannot allow the State to deprive her of her own office; she cannot permit her message and her form to be determined by the State. She is, subject to her commission, fundamentally a free Church in a State which, subject to its commission, is likewise fundamentally free.

The view is herewith rejected that the State is the highest or the only totalitarian, visibly and temporally formed reality to which therefore even the Church has to subordinate and to conform herself, or to be incorporated in it.

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## II.

THE CONFESSION OF FAITH  
of the  
CONFSSIONAL SYNOD OF THE GERMAN EVANGELICAL  
CHURCH IN WUPPERTAL-BARMEN,  
May 29-31, 1934.

I. An appeal to the Evangelical Congregations and  
Christians in Germany.

The Confessional synod of the German Evangelical Church met in Barmen, May 29-31, 1934. Here representatives from all German confessional Churches found themselves unanimous in confession to the one Lord of the one holy, apostolic Church. In fidelity to their Confession of Faith members of Lutheran, Reformed and United Churches sought a common word to the need and temptation of the Church in our day. With gratitude to God they at least believe that the common word has



been put in their mouths. They did not wish to found either a new Church or to set up a union. For nothing was further from their minds than the annulment of the confessional stand of our Churches. Their intention was rather to withstand in faith and unanimity the destruction of the Confession, and with it the Evangelical Church in Germany. The Confessional synod resists the attempts to restore the unity of the German Evangelical Church by false doctrine, by the application of force, or by improper proceedings: the unity of the Evangelical Churches of Germany can only come from the Word of God in faith through the Holy Spirit. Thus alone is the Church renewed.

Therefore the Confessional synod calls upon the congregations to stand behind it in prayer, and soberly to gather themselves around their shepherds and teachers who are loyal to the Confession.

Be not deceived with vain words, as if we meant to resist the unity of the German nation! Do not listen to the seducers who pervert our intentions, as if we planned to break up the unity of the German Evangelical Church, or to abandon the Confessions of Faith of our Fathers!

Prove the spirits whether they are of God! Prove also the word of the Confessional synod of the German

Evangelical Church, whether it is in agreement with Holy Scripture and the confessional documents of the Fathers.

If you find that we are speaking contrary to Scripture, then do not listen to us! If you find that we stand on the Scripture, then let no fear or temptation restrain you from treading with us the path of faith and obedience to the Word of God, in order that God's people might be of one mind upon earth and that we, believing, might learn that He Himself has said: "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee". - Therefore: "Fear not, little flock; for it is the Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom."

## II. Resolution of the Confessional synod of the German Evangelical Church.

1. The synod acknowledges the theological explanation of the present situation of the German Evangelical Church, in connection with Pastor Asmussen's address, to be a Christian, Biblical-Reformation witness, and assumes responsibility for it.

2. The synod hands this declaration to confessional conventions for the purpose of working out a responsible exposition of their own Confessions.

### III. Theological Explanation of the Present

#### Situation of the German Evangelical Church.

According to the opening words of her constitution of July 11, 1933, the German Evangelical Church is a union of the Confessional Churches which grew out of the Reformation and stand on an equal footing. The theological presupposition of the unification of these Churches is stated in Art. I and Art. II, 1, of the constitution of the German Evangelical Church which was recognised by the Reich government of July 14, 1933.

**Art. I:** The inexpugnable foundation of the German Evangelical Church is the Gospel of Jesus Christ as it is testified to in Holy Scripture and brought to light again in the Confessions of the Reformation. The authorisation which the Church requires for her mission is herein determined and limited.

**Art. II, 1:** The German Evangelical Church organises herself into Churches (Territorial Churches).

We, who are the united representatives of Lutheran, Reformed and United Churches, and from free synods, Church meetings and congregational circles to the Confessional synod of the German Evangelical Church, declare that we stand together on the ground of the German Evangelical Church as a union of the German Confessional Churches. The Confession to the one Lord of the one,

holy, catholic and apostolic Church binds us together.

We publicly declare before all Evangelical Churches of Germany that the common nature of this Confession, and with it also the unity of the German Evangelical Church is grievously imperilled. It is menaced by the method of teaching and procedure of the ruling Church party of the German Christians and of the Church administration carried on by them. This method became more and more visible in the first year of the setting up of the German Evangelical Church. This menace consists in the fact that the theological presupposition in which the German Evangelical Church is united, has been continuously and radically abolished and made ineffective by alien presuppositions, as much from the side of the leaders and spokesmen of the German Christians as from that of the Church administration. If these are valid, then according to all the Confessions which are in force among us, the Church ceases to be a Church. If they are valid, the German Evangelical Church as a union of Confessional Churches becomes therefore inwardly impossible.

As members of Lutheran, Reformed and United Churches we are permitted and must speak with one voice in this matter to-day. Just because we wish to be, and to remain faithful to our different Confessions of Faith,

we cannot be silent; for we believe that we have been given a common word to speak in a time of common need and temptation. We commend to God what this may mean for the relation of the Confessional Churches to one another.

In view of the errors of the "German Christians" and the present Reich Church government which are devastating the Church and at the same time breaking up the unity of the German Evangelical Church, we confess the following evangelical truths:

1. "I am the way, the truth and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by me." (John 14:6)

"Verily, verily I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved."  
(John 10:1,9)

Jesus Christ as He is testified to in Holy Scripture is the one Word of God which we have to hear, and which we have to trust and obey in life and in death.

We reject the false doctrine that the Church might and must acknowledge as sources of her proclamation apart from and beside this one Word of God still other events, powers, forms and truths as God's revelation.

2. "But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God

is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." (I Cor. 1:30)

As Jesus Christ is God's consolation of the forgiveness of all our sins, so is He also, and with equal seriousness, God's mighty claim upon our whole life. Through Him there meets us the joyous liberation from the ungodly fetters of this world into free, thankful ministry to His creatures.

We reject the false doctrine that there are spheres of our life in which we are to own other lords than Jesus Christ, spheres in which we did not need justification and sanctification through Him.

3. "But speaking the truth in love, let us grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body is fitly joined together."

(A.V. Eph. 4:15,16.)

The Christian Church is the community of brethren in which Jesus Christ acts presently as the Lord in Word and Sacrament through the Holy Spirit. As the Church of pardoned sinners she has to testify in the midst of a world of sin with her faith as with her obedience, with her message as with her order, that she is solely His property, that she lives and desires to live solely by His consolation and by His direction, in the expectation of His appearance.

We reject the false doctrine that the Church is permitted to abandon the form of her message and her order to her own pleasure or to changes in the prevailing world-views and political convictions.

4. "Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister." (Matt. 20:25,26.)

The different offices in the Church do not establish a dominion of some over the others, but on the contrary, the exercise of the ministry is entrusted and enjoined upon the whole congregation.

We reject the false doctrine that the Church, apart from this ministry, might or ought to give herself, or allow to be given her, special leaders equipped with ruling powers.

5. "Fear God. Honour the king." (I Peter 2:17.)

The Scripture tells us that the State has, according to divine ordinance, the task of providing for law and peace in a world which is not yet redeemed and in which the Church also stands. The State fulfils this task by means of the threat and exercise of force according to the measure of human judgment and human ability. The Church acknowledges in thankfulness towards God the

benefit of these His ordinances. She remembers the Kingdom of God, God's commandment and righteousness, and with that the responsibility of rulers and ruled. She trusts and obeys the power of the Word, by which God sustains all things.

We reject the false doctrine that the State, over and above its own special commission, ought and might become the single and totalitarian ordering of human life, and hence fulfil the function of determining the Church as well.

We reject the false doctrine that the Church, over and above her special commission, ought and might appropriate the character, the tasks and the dignity of the State, and thereby herself become an organ of the State.

6. "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the World." (Matt. 28:20.) "The Word of God is not bound." (II Tim. 2:9.)

The commission of the Church which is the ground of her freedom, consists in delivering the message of the free grace of God to all people in Christ's stead, and therefore in the ministry of His own Word and work through preaching and Sacrament.

We reject the false doctrine that the Church in human glorification might place the Word and work of the Lord in the service of some arbitrarily chosen



desires, purposes and plans.

The Confessional synod of the German Evangelical Church declares that it sees in the acknowledgment of these truths and in the rejection of these errors the incontrovertible theological foundation of the German Evangelical Church as a union of confessional Churches. It challenges all who are able to adopt its declaration to be mindful of these items of theological knowledge in decisions in their Church politics.

She asks all whom it may concern to return to the unity of faith, love and hope.

Verbum Dei manet in aeternum.

#### IV. Declaration concerning the legal position of the German Evangelical Church.

1. The inexpugnable basis of the German Evangelical Church is the Gospel of Jesus Christ as it is testified to in Holy Scripture and brought to light again in the Confessions of the Reformation.

The present Reich Church administration has abandoned this inexpugnable basis and has been guilty of numerous violations of the law and constitution. It has thereby forfeited the claim to be the legitimate head of the German Evangelical Church.

16c Only those who are called and who wish to hold

fast to Holy Scripture and to the Confession of Faith of the Church as her inexpugnable foundation, and who want to make both the authoritative standard in the German Evangelical Church again, are legally to speak and to act in the name of the German Evangelical Church.

The congregations and Churches agreed in such a Confession are the legitimate German Evangelical Church.

2. In the present straits of the Church the Confessional synod has the task of assembling the confessional congregations in the German Evangelical Church and of representing them, of caring for their fellowship and common tasks, and of working to that end that the German Evangelical Church be led according to the Gospel and the Confession of Faith, and that thereby her right and her constitution be protected.

3. In the Church no separation of external order from the Confession is possible. In so far as the division of the German Evangelical Church into Territorial Churches, laid down in the constitution, according to the Confession. Territorial Churches bound to the Confession may not be robbed of their independence through membership in the German Evangelical Church as a result of administration or compulsion from without, because their external Church order always has to justify itself before the Confession of Faith. The incorporations

which have hitherto been contracted by the Reich Church government are now legally ineffective.

4. The unity of the German Evangelical Church is not created by the remorseless erection of a central power which derives its justification from a worldly principle of leadership foreign to the Church. The hierarchical formation of the Church contradicts the Reformation Confession of Faith.

5. The German Evangelical Church can only achieve her genuine Church unity by (a) protecting the Reformation Confessions and by demanding an organic union of the Territorial Churches and congregations on the basis of their confessional stand; (b) by giving to the congregation as the bearer of the proclamation of the Word the place which is due it. It must be her earnest desire that the Spirit of the Lord Christ and not the spirit of worldly rule be decisive in the Church of our Fathers.

In obedience to the Lord of the Church there lies such strong uniting power that in spite of the variety in the Reformation Confessions we can stand together in a unity of purpose and action in the German Evangelical Church.

V. Declaration concerning the practical work  
of the Confessional synod of the  
German Evangelical Church.

In the sixth point of the common witness of the Confessional synod of the German Evangelical Church we read: "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world" (Matt. 28:20). "The Word of God is not bound" (II Tim. 2:9). The commission of the Church which is the ground of her freedom, consists in delivering the message of the free grace of God to all people in Christ's stead, and therefore in the ministry of His own Word and work through preaching and Sacrament."

In these words the Confessional Church of Germany is summoned to a work of ministry.

God has given us Confessional congregations. Through the resuscitation of many members and pastors of congregations, a new sanctified will to service has been awakened. When the Confessional synod of the German Evangelical Church takes over the leadership of the German Evangelical Christianity, it thereby takes over a great responsibility for the new gifts and powers which God has given to Evangelical Christianity. Consequently the following is recommended as urgent work for the Confessional synod of the German Evangelical Church:

1. Ministering to the spiritual renewal of ministers.

If the minister is to perform the new tasks given to him by God for the edification of the congregation in the Spirit of the Word of God, he needs the permanent discipline and guidance of the Holy Spirit.

- i. The spiritual ministry of the brethren among one another:
  - (a) The ministers must unite and regularly meet in the separate synods for mutual service, for common work under God's Word, and for prayer. From time to time ministers' wives must also take part in such meetings.
  - (b) We also require in our Church that men who execute the office of exhortation and comforting be at liberty on occasions to strengthen and admonish the brethren from place to place, especially those who are isolated.
  - (c) Special retreats of several days' duration away from the great cities; if possible also for ministers' wives.
  - (d) Spiritual fellowship held at regular intervals.
- ii. A serious theological training, in order to attain a thorough agreement in questions of doctrine in conventions properly constituted according to the Confession.
- iii. Systematic education for the ministry in the congregation. This education, which hitherto has been more or less left to chance, demands serious training in the preaching, instruction and pastoral work of the minister.
- iv. Enlistment of the rising theological generation:
  - (a) by meetings at the universities and during holidays.
  - (b) in appropriate assistantships.

- (c) In seminaries for preachers,
- (d) In theological schools,
- (e) Retreats.

2. Edification of the Confessional congregations.

The relation of the minister and congregation are of the closest nature; for the Shepherd stands in the congregation and the congregation stands with the Shepherd. The Confessional congregation, which is eager for service, must nevertheless be equipped for that purpose. No Church order for Confessional congregations is to be drawn up here. It is referred to the decision of the Prussian Confessional synod: "The edification of the Confessional Church of the old Prussian Union".<sup>1</sup> Reference to what is now to be done in the congregation by way of service is only to be made in connection with the witness of the Confessional synod.

1. The Confessional congregation as a spiritual organism.

(a) The ministry of the Word. The congregations have again to learn that the Sunday worship of God stands at the centre of the life of the congregation. The religious observance of the Sabbath is to be enjoined upon the congregations with absolute earnestness. To

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1. This is a reference to a clause in a Confession drawn up at the Confessional Synod of the Evangelical Church of the old Prussian Union in Wuppertal-Barmen, May 29, 1934.

the edification of the congregation belongs the administration of the Sacraments, the meaning of which is to be disclosed to the congregation anew. Instruction, meeting of young people who have been confirmed (the teaching of Christians), Bible Class and pastoral work contribute to the most necessary, personal familiarity with the Bible.

(b) Special arrangements for the training of the congregation. Service for men, retreats for elders, and evening meetings for parents to further Christian family life, and women's societies.

2. Because the free societies are only capable of existing on the basis of the Confessional congregation (Home Missions Society, Foreign Missions, Young Peoples' Society, societies for men and women, etc.), a definite decision for the Confessional synod of the German Evangelical Church is to be demanded of them and their leaders. Only in so far as this decision ensues will they retain their title to the edification of the Confessional congregation.

3. , Mission of the Confessional congregation.  
Only where brotherly aid is seriously afforded the Shepherds of the congregation, and the congregation genuinely lives as a spiritual organism - that means as the body of Christ - is it fit for the ministry which

it has to perform for all people through preaching and Sacrament, namely, the ministry of the proclamation of the free grace of God in Christ Jesus. The commission is great, the field is broad and ripe for the harvest. All active members of the congregation are included in this missionary work, either as those who proclaim, or as those who make intercession. The sign of a living congregation is always that it is missionary.

- i. Special tasks within the individual congregations (Evangelisation, distribution of literature, Bible-weeks for the deepening of the spiritual life).
- ii. Ministering to those alienated (Free-thinkers, German Faith Movement).
- iii. Responsibility for congregations and districts of the German Evangelical Church in special danger (Compilation of a list of tried evangelists; working out plans and themes).
- iv. Ministering to the Reich army (Drill centres, Storm Troopers, Black Corp, Hitler Youth, provision for the labour and youth camps).

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### III.

#### CALVIN AND THE CONFESSION OF FAITH.

In view of the fact that John Calvin was the author of several of our Confessional standards and the inspirer of most of them, we have deemed it appropriate



to append a short article dealing with his teaching concerning a Confession of Faith. As a rule the Reformers, including Calvin, did not speak of the nature, possibility and authority of a Confession. They spoke of the power of the Church in councils, and laid down those conditions which were necessary before the edicts, laws and doctrines formulated by a council could be recognised and approved.

Calvin teaches that the power which is given in the Church is for edification and not for destruction,<sup>1</sup> and that "the only mode by which ministers can edify the Church is by studying to maintain the authority of Christ".<sup>2</sup> "For it was not said of any other but of himself alone, 'Hear Him' (Matt. 17:5)."<sup>3</sup> "It is therefore necessary to remember, that whatever authority and dignity the Holy Spirit in Scripture confers on priests, or prophets, or apostles or successors of apostles, is wholly given not to men themselves, but to the ministry to which they are appointed; or to speak more plainly, to the word, to the ministry of which they are appointed..... They were not invested with

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1. Calvin's Institutes, Bk. IV, Chap. VIII, Sec. 1.

2. Ibid. Sec. 1.

3. Ibid. Sec. 1.

authority to teach or give responses save in the name and the word of the Lord. For whenever they are called to office, they are enjoined not to bring anything of their own, but to speak by the mouth of the Lord."<sup>1</sup> The Holy Spirit is given to the Church not for the purpose of revealing new truths, but of putting her in remembrance of all things which Jesus had told her. The restriction should be carefully noted.

"The office which He (Christ) assigns to the Holy Spirit is to bring to remembrance what His own lips had previously taught."<sup>2</sup> (John 14:26; 16:13.) "We conclude, therefore, that it does not now belong to faithful ministers to coin some new doctrines, but simply to adhere to the doctrine to which all, without exception, are made subject. When I say this, I mean to show not only what each individual, but what the whole Church, is bound to do."<sup>3</sup>

The Roman Church had taught concerning councils that "a universal council is a true representation of the Church" and that "such councils are under the immediate guidance of the Holy Spirit, and therefore cannot err."<sup>4</sup> "When they (the Roman Church) deny that

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1. Ibid. Sec. 2.

2. Ibid. Sec. 8.

3. Ibid. Sec. 9.

4. Ibid. Sec. 10.

the Church cannot err, their end and meaning are to this effect: Since the Church is governed by the Spirit of God, she can walk safely without the Word."<sup>1</sup> Thus, "they place the authority of the Church without the Word of God; we annex it to the Word, and allow it not to be separated from it".<sup>2</sup> "Wherefore, let not the Church be wise in herself, nor think anything of herself, but let her consider her wisdom terminated when He ceases to speak. In this way she will distrust all the inventions of her own reason; and when she leans on the Word of God, will not waver in diffidence or hesitation, but rest in full assurance and unwavering constancy."<sup>3</sup>

We perceive that Calvin taught that a creed or a Confession, promulgated by a Council, could not contain doctrines which were not derived from Scripture. Moreover, the authority of the declaration of a Council (or synod) lay in its conformity to Holy Writ. The Councils had the task of interpreting Scripture, and their doctrines were interpretations of Scripture. The Roman Catholics objected that nowhere in Scripture do we find what is declared in the Council of Nice, viz.,

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1. Ibid. Sec. 13.
  2. Ibid. Sec. 13.
  3. Ibid. Sec. 13.

that the Son is consubstantial with the Father. Calvin answers that they "do a grievous injustice to the Fathers, as if they had rashly condemned Arius for not swearing to their words, though professing the whole of that doctrine which is contained in the writings of the prophets and apostles."<sup>1</sup> Calvin admits that "the expression does not exist in Scripture, but seeing it is there so often declared that there is one God, and Christ is so often called true and eternal God, one with the Father, what do the Nicene Fathers do when they affirm that He is of one essence, than simply declare the genuine meaning of Scripture?"

Barth says that Christ calls forth the Confession of the Church when the Church hears His Word in Scripture through the Holy Spirit. Calvin teaches that Christ presides over all councils "when He governs the whole assembly by His Word and Spirit".<sup>2</sup> Christ has promised that "where two or three are gathered together in my Name, there am I in the midst of them". The authority granted here is as applicable to a small group as it is to an ecumenical council. Those assemblies which disregard His command by which He forbids anything to be added to the Word of God or taken from it; which

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1. Ibid. Sec. 16.

2. Ibid. Bk. IV, Chap. IX, Sec. 1.

determine everything at their own pleasure or devise some novelty out of their own head, do not convene in the name of the Lord.<sup>1</sup> Whereas Barth describes the marks of a true and false Confession, Calvin describes the marks of a true and false council. And whereas Barth affirms the authority of a Confession, Calvin acknowledges the authority of a Council. But both teachers emphasise the necessity of discrimination. The outstanding example of a false council cited by Calvin is that in which priests and Pharisees assembled at Jerusalem against Christ<sup>2</sup> (John 11:47). Externally it bore all the marks of a legitimate council.

"Whenever the decree of a council is produced," writes Calvin, "the first thing I would wish to be done is, to examine at what time it was held, on what occasion, with what intention, and who were present at it; next I would bring the subject discussed to the standard of Scripture..... I wish all had observed the method which Augustine prescribes in his Third Book against Maximus, when he wished to silence the cavils of this heretic against the decrees of councils, 'I ought not to oppose the Council of Nice to you, nor ought you to oppose that of Ariminum to me, as

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1. Ibid. Sec. 2.

2. Ibid. Sec. 7.

prejudicing the question. I am not bound by the authority of the latter, nor you by that of the former. Let thing contend with thing, cause with cause, reason with reason, on the authority of Scripture, an authority not peculiar to either but common to all.' In this way, councils would be duly respected, and yet the highest place would be given to Scripture, everything being brought to it as a test."<sup>1</sup> Calvin exposes the inconsistencies and contradictions in the decrees of the councils to show that they can not be taken as a final authority.<sup>2</sup>

Having proved that no power was given to the Church to set up any new doctrine, Calvin discusses the power attributed to councils in the interpretation of Scripture. He insists that when a doctrine is in dispute there is "no better remedy than for a council of true bishops to meet and discuss the controverted point".<sup>3</sup> "There will be much more weight in a decision of this kind, to which the pastors of Churches have agreed in common after invoking the Spirit of Christ, than if each, adopting it for himself, should deliver it to his people, or a few individuals should meet in private and

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1. Ibid. Sec. 8.

2. Ibid. Sec. 9.

3. Ibid. Sec. 13.

decide."<sup>1</sup> The distinction which Calvin makes here corresponds to the distinction which Barth makes between a Confession of Faith and dogmatics. It also confirms Barth's insistence that only a Church, or a properly constituted court of the Church can confess, and not an individual or a convention of free theologically-minded persons. Calvin adds that "if any one trouble the Church with some novelty in doctrine, and the matter be carried so far that there is danger of a greater dissension, the Churches should first meet, examine the question, and at length, after due discussion, decide according to Scripture, which may both put an end to doubt in the people, and stop the mouths of wicked and restless men, so as to prevent the matter from proceeding farther..... In short, this was from the first the usual method of preserving unity in the Church whenever Satan commenced his machinations."<sup>2</sup> We observe that whereas Barth teaches that the Church preserves her unity in her Confession, Calvin speaks of a council instead. Yet the meaning of both is the same. Nevertheless, both Calvin and Barth<sup>3</sup> issue the warning that a council or Confession is no absolute safeguard against heresy.

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1. Ibid. Sec. 13.

2. Ibid. Sec. 13.

3. See Part I, Chap. I, Sec. 5, p. 42 of this thesis; also pp. 45, 46, 47; and Sec. 7, p. 80.

Like Barth, Calvin teaches that the Bible is the concrete authority for the Church apart from and above the Church itself.<sup>1</sup>

In the dedication of the Catechism of the Church of Geneva, Calvin writes: "It were to be wished, not only that a perpetual consent in the doctrine of piety should appear among all, but also that one Catechism were common to all the Churches. But as, from many causes, it will scarcely ever obtain otherwise than that each Church shall have its own Catechism, we should not strive too keenly to prevent this; provided, however, that the variety in the mode of teaching is such that we are all directed to one Christ in whose truth being united together, we may grow up into one body and one spirit, and with the same mouth also proclaim whatever belongs to the sum of faith. Catechists not intent on this end, besides fatally injuring the Church, by sowing the materials of dissension in religion, also introduce a profanation of baptism. For where can any longer be the utility of baptism unless this remain as its foundation - that we all agree in one faith?" There is therefore no doubt that Calvin is one with Barth in teaching that the Church finds and preserves her unity in her Confession.

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